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# Selective Nuclear Options in American and Soviet Strategic Policy

Benjamin S. Lambeth

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A report prepared for  
DIRECTOR OF DEFENSE RESEARCH AND ENGINEERING

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PREFACE

Rand is providing analytical support to the Office of the Assistant Director of Defense Research and Engineering (Net Technical Assessment) through a series of studies that deal with key national security issues involving research, development, and technology. This report is part of a project that addresses the relative abilities of the United States and the Soviet Union to engage in selective nuclear operations. Research in connection with this project attempts to isolate aspects of U.S. and Soviet doctrine, target systems, military forces, and command and control capabilities that appear significant for each side's ability to conduct such operations.

The present study focuses on U.S. and Soviet doctrinal attitudes toward selective nuclear operations, the critical asymmetries between them, and some of the implications of those asymmetries for current U.S. nuclear contingency planning. Although it addresses both inter-continental and theater nuclear war matters, the bulk of its attention is directed toward strategic force issues generated by the 1974 national policy calling for the development of U.S. selective attack options below the SIOP level. Accordingly, much of the important collateral work done in theater nuclear doctrine over the past two years is not covered.



### SUMMARY

In January 1974, Secretary of Defense Schlesinger announced a major reorientation of U.S. strategic nuclear targeting policy aimed at supplementing the assured retaliatory strategy incorporated in the SIOP with an additional range of more selective strike options for deterring (or responding to) a Soviet attack below the spasm war threshold. This policy shift was largely inspired by two stimuli. The first was the dramatic surge in protected Soviet strategic force deployment since the late 1960s, which portended an unprecedentedly rich Soviet menu of targeting options short of the massive attack scenario envisaged by formal Soviet military doctrine and also virtually ruled out any workable U.S. counterforce strategy against the Soviet Union for the indefinite future. The second was a growing disenchantment throughout the national security community with the near-exclusive U.S. reliance on the "assured destruction" formula and a growing perception of need within the government to provide the President with a greater breadth of nuclear options than the SIOP or nothing.

Although it has coincided with a period of vigorous U.S. R&D activity in strategic offensive weaponry, this targeting reorientation is not tied to the introduction of new systems into the U.S. force structure. It principally involves the development of numerous attack options designed to extract additional political and strategic utility from the *existing* U.S. nuclear posture. Previous U.S. strategic targeting policy tended to be fixated on deterrence and paid little attention to coping with a deterrence breakdown. Rather than providing flexible options for dealing with a Soviet attack to maximize the possibility of an early settlement on reasonably favorable terms, previous policy sought little more than an assured capability for inflicting *massive punishment* on the Soviets for their transgression. This goal not only reflected an implicit abdication of political responsibility but also risked provoking precisely the sort of Soviet counterreprisal against the United States that a rational wartime strategy should attempt to prevent.

Current U.S. nuclear planning guidance, while no less emphatic than its predecessors in stressing the primacy of deterrence, recognizes that deterrence can fail at many levels short of a massive Soviet first strike against the United States. In addition to the last-resort punitive retaliatory option, it seeks to provide means for using strategic forces in response to Soviet nuclear attacks on the United States against which the full-scale SIOP reprisal would be inappropriate, thereby enhancing deterrence and assuring that U.S. leaders would have alternatives other than inaction were those initiatives to occur.

This shift in U.S. nuclear targeting policy has naturally met with sustained and unqualified hostility on the part of the Soviet Union, whose public pronouncements have described the policy as anti-détente, contrary to the spirit of SALT, aimed at "legitimizing" the use of nuclear weapons, and insensitive to the realities of nuclear warfare. Enunciated Soviet military doctrine asserts that nuclear operations cannot be submitted to finely tuned control in the intense heat of battle and rejects out of hand the concept of restrained nuclear warfare. The current U.S. development of selective nuclear options has no analog in known Soviet military concepts and contingency planning, which appear predominantly oriented toward massive nuclear strikes aimed at capitalizing on the inherent power of the initiative and achieving some recognizable form of military victory.

Coming as it does when the notion of limited nuclear war remains anathema to expressed Soviet military thinking, the current U.S. effort to develop options for controlled and selective nuclear targeting raises critical questions of appropriateness and practicality. Supporters of the U.S. strategy believe that the Soviets are governed by a keen instinct for self-preservation and, like all reasonable men, will unhesitatingly cast aside their avowed doctrinal preconceptions if a nuclear crisis (and U.S. behavior in it) should suggest that as an appropriate course of action. Critics of the strategy insist that whatever merits the notion of limitation may have as an abstract strategic principle, Soviet military doctrine remains a fact of life that has to be accounted for. Although it may not predetermine Soviet behavior, they maintain, it nonetheless is an important indicator of



general strategic predispositions that will affect Soviet military actions in a crisis.

In all likelihood, both of these perspectives contain important elements of truth. Soviet strategic philosophy remains fundamentally unlike that of the United States, and it is highly improbable that the Soviets will ever so thoroughly abandon their ingrained military heritage as to develop force-application options informed by the same premises and assumptions as our own. Given this prospect that the Soviets will always remain strongly governed by their own idiosyncratic past, a Soviet "selective nuclear operation" could well end up looking very much like the full counterforce portion of the U.S. SIOP. At the same time, the Soviet Union possesses an abundant and growing array of weapons and command and control systems suitable for conducting nuclear operations below the spasm-war level. Moreover, although Soviet military pronouncements have shown open contempt for the concept of limitation in nuclear warfare, Soviet political leaders still are capable of improvising in crises. In circumstances where they would have *incentives* for limitation, there is no reason for believing that they would be precommitted by--or feel obliged to follow--their publicly articulated nuclear doctrine.

The important point for U.S. policy is that whatever behavior the Soviets might pursue in a nuclear crisis, the desirability of maintaining a U.S. selective options strategy need not hinge exclusively on the course and outcome of future developments in Soviet nuclear planning. Flexibility is a valuable asset to have *whatever* the other side does. Mere possession of selective options neither commits the United States to limited nuclear use in a crisis nor requires us to expect that the Soviets will comply with the norm of restraint. Flexible options can provide U.S. leaders with valuable capabilities (or valuable points of departure for improvising) in the unlikely but consequential event that U.S.-Soviet relations deteriorated into a crisis in which neither the SIOP nor its Soviet equivalent would be usable. Flexible options, then, are more a low-cost investment against a **remote** possibility than a venture doomed to failure should the Soviets continue to follow a different strategic doctrine.



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ABBREVIATIONS

ABM	Antiballistic Missile
C <sup>3</sup>	Command, Control, and Communications
CINCSAC	Commander-in-Chief, Strategic Air Command
CONUS	Continental United States
DoD	Department of Defense
FY	Fiscal Year
ICBM	Intercontinental Ballistic Missile
IRBM	Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile
LNO	Limited Nuclear Option
MIRV	Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicle
MRBM	Medium-Range Ballistic Missile
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCA	National Command Authority
NSDM	National Security Decision Memorandum
NSSM	National Security Study Memorandum
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
QRA	Quick-Reaction Alert
RV	Reentry Vehicle
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander, Europe
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Talks
SIOP	Single Integrated Operational Plan
SLBM	Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile
SRAM	Short-Range Attack Missile
SSBN	Ballistic Missile Submarine (Nuclear)
UK	United Kingdom
ZI	Zone of the Interior



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## I. INTRODUCTION

In the course of their evolution over the past decade and a half, the strategic postures of the United States and the Soviet Union have gradually acquired a number of common characteristics. Both countries have accumulated a large inventory of ICBMs, deployed in hardened silos and supported by complex and redundant command and control systems. Both have acquired a sizable fleet of ballistic missile submarines whose near-invulnerability to simultaneous destruction by a coordinated attack provides each with a high-confidence second-strike force. Both have successfully developed multiple reentry vehicle technology and have adapted MIRV systems to their missile forces, the United States on MINUTEMAN III and POSEIDON and the Soviet Union on its fourth-generation ICBMs now entering initial operational capability. Both, finally, have invested in long-range strategic bombers, whose capacity for dispersing to remote airfields during crises, diverting to alternate targets enroute, and providing post-strike battle-damage assessment offers each country a redundant nuclear offensive capability and an added measure of flexibility. Although ballistic missiles have long since become the "main echelon" of the two superpowers' nuclear offensive postures, the active development of the variable-geometry B-1 bomber by the United States and the ongoing deployment of the similar (though more range-restricted and less technically elegant) BACKFIRE bomber by the Soviet Union attest to the continued value both countries place on manned aircraft in their strategic planning.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Despite their gross compositional similarities, the U.S. and Soviet strategic arsenals reflect sufficient asymmetries in their technical characteristics, performance capabilities, and levels of technological sophistication to make them noncomparable in many important respects. A useful comparative overview of current and projected U.S. and Soviet strategic attack capabilities may be found in Edward Luttwak, *The U.S.-USSR Nuclear Weapons Balance*, The Washington Papers, No. 13, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, 1974. On the diverse organizational and doctrinal origins of Soviet strategic forces, see also Major Edward L. Warner, III, "Soviet Strategic Posture: Some Alternative Explanations," in F. B. Horton, III, A. C. Rogerson, and E. L. Warner, III (eds.), *Comparative Defense Policy*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1974, pp. 310-325.

This seeming convergence of the U.S. and Soviet force postures into rough equivalence has led a number of observers to conclude that the strategic *doctrines* of the two have likewise been steadily moving into symmetry. One variation on this theme is a form of straightforward technological determinism asserting (a) that similar weapons and force postures naturally inspire similar military strategies, and (b) that since U.S. strategic policy places such a high premium on deterrence stability through "mutual assured vulnerability," the Soviet Union--with its newly acquired status of parity with the United States--must logically hold to similar views. As one proponent of this view has put it, the use by each country of similar weapons and technologies has exerted a "leveling effect" on the military doctrines of the two powers, "creating a gradual convergence of strategic concepts and policies derivative from this new iron law of nuclear technology."<sup>2</sup> A second variant of "doctrinal convergence" bases its argument on strategic necessity, which holds that the prevailing U.S.-Soviet balance permits no alternative but a common strategy for each side.<sup>3</sup> This latter view is frequently expressed by supporters of deterrence through "mutual assured destruction," who characteristically cite Moscow's accession to the 1972 ABM Treaty as proof that the Soviet leadership has given up whatever hopes it may once have had for a workable defense against ballistic missiles and has finally accepted U.S. (or, more properly, the proponents' own) strategic concepts.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Roman Kolkowicz, "Strategic Parity and Beyond: Soviet Perspectives," *World Politics*, Vol. XXIII, No. 3, April 1971, p. 451. See also Kolkowicz, "Strategic Elites and Politics of Superpowers," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. XXVI, No. 1, 1972, pp. 40-59.

<sup>3</sup>This viewpoint underlay much of the public justification for SALT I and is strongly represented in John Newhouse, *Cold Dawn: The Story of SALT*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1973.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, the explicit assertion to this effect in Jerome H. Kahan, "Is U.S.-Soviet Nuclear Strategy Really Due for a Change?" *The Washington Post*, April 23, 1973. A more likely possibility is that the Soviets merely saw their GALOSH ABM as being technologically inadequate and chose to seek a SALT agreement that would block deployment of the superior U.S. SAFEGUARD while permitting continued Soviet R&D on more advanced ballistic missile defense systems. Despite the ABM Treaty, the Soviets continue to show intense interest in ABM systems,

These two images of emergent U.S.-Soviet doctrinal symmetry are dominated by a common ethnocentric bias that projects Western strategic premises and practices onto Soviet military planning and assumes that whatever is logical or preferable for U.S. military theoreticians must also be acceptable to Soviet political-military leaders. Both ignore the injunction offered well over a decade ago by Garthoff that "in order to establish the strategic thought and doctrine of an alien military culture, it is first necessary to escape the confines of one's own implicit and unconscious strategic concept."<sup>5</sup> Both, moreover, seem unattuned to the sizable body of declaratory Soviet military doctrine and policy that stands in sharp opposition to the notion of doctrinal convergence and symmetry. However much the U.S. and Soviet strategic arsenals may superficially resemble one another, the strategic premises and priorities that underlie them remain worlds apart. Both sides, of course, believe that nuclear war is to be prevented at every reasonable cost, and nuclear deterrence dominates their strategic planning processes. But when one departs from these shared platitudes and looks to the likely character of a nuclear war, the objectives to be sought in it, and the force-application concepts best suited to achieving them if deterrence fails, one quickly finds that Soviet political and military leaders speak a language quite different from that of their American counterparts.

Nowhere is this U.S.-Soviet doctrinal chasm more pronounced than on the question of limitation in a possible future nuclear war with the two superpowers exchanging weapons against one another's homelands. U.S. nuclear targeting policy is now developing capabilities and options for selective nuclear operations below the full SIOP threshold. Coming as it does when the concept of limitation in strategic war remains anathema to publicly enunciated Soviet strategic thought, this "retargeting strategy" (as it has somewhat erroneously come to be called in

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are currently engaged in a vigorous ABM R&D program, and give no indication in their military-doctrinal writings of having repudiated their traditional emphasis on the importance of strategic defense in modern warfare.

<sup>5</sup> Raymond L. Garthoff, *Soviet Strategy in the Nuclear Age*, Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1962, p. xi.

popular discourse) raises some critical questions of appropriateness and practicality. Even accepting the proposition that the U.S. NCA can maintain the self-discipline and organizational control necessary to carry out a strategy of limited response and fine-tuned diplomatic coercion under the stresses of a deep nuclear crisis, what use is such a strategy if the adversary has declared in advance that he will not be a party to any such concept?

Once again, there are two opposing views on this question. One school, largely composed of supporters of the current U.S. nuclear policy guidance, maintains that whatever the Soviets may say in their public pronouncements, they remain governed by a keen instinct for self-preservation and, like all reasonable men, will be strongly disposed to cast aside their preconceptions in favor of improvisation if a nuclear crisis (and U.S. behavior in it) should suggest that as an appropriate course of action. Former Secretary Schlesinger himself expressed this point as clearly as anyone:

I believe . . . if we were to maintain continued communications with the Soviet leaders during the war, and if we were to describe precisely and meticulously the limited nature of our actions, including the desire to avoid attacking their civilian-industrial base, that in spite of whatever one says historically in advance that everything must go all out, when the existential circumstances arise, political leaders on both sides will be under powerful pressure to continue to be sensible. Both sides under these circumstances will continue to have the capacity at any time to destroy the civilian-industrial base of the other. The leaders on both sides will know that. Those are circumstances in which I believe that leaders will be rational and prudent.<sup>6</sup>

The opposite school, containing a mixture of outright critics of and hesitant sympathizers with the selective-options policy, espouses a substantially gloomier view. Whatever the merits of limitation as an abstract principle, its adherents assert, Soviet military doctrine is a hard fact of life that has to be accounted for. Although it may not rigidly predetermine Soviet behavior in a crisis, it is nonetheless an important indicator of general Soviet strategic predispositions. At

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<sup>6</sup>Quoted in *Aerospace Daily*, April 12, 1974.

best, this school maintains, a U.S. strategy of calculated limited nuclear use would be highly provocative and would risk inducing the Soviets, during a crisis, into escalatory actions they might prefer to avoid. At worst, it fundamentally misreads Soviet norms of strategic behavior and would quickly lead the United States into a military cul de sac in which unrestrained Soviet nuclear retaliation would be the result.<sup>7</sup>

The nature of Soviet behavior in any confrontation in which U.S. limited nuclear strikes might be used is far too complex a question to permit any single pat answer or categorical prediction, and in fact both hypotheses contain some important truths. Formal Soviet military doctrine indeed stands at almost complete variance with the expressed concepts and intentions of the emerging U.S. selective targeting policy, and U.S. development of limited nuclear options has met with uniform hostility on the part of the Soviet press. Of all the conceptual and weaponry asymmetries currently in the U.S.-Soviet strategic nuclear confrontation, the one that rests on the question of targeting limitation and intrawar "crisis management" is the most dominant and irreconcilable. At the same time, there is no doubt that the Soviet Union possesses a rich array of military capabilities, including the weapons systems and command and control wherewithal for conducting nuclear operations below the spasm war level. Moreover, despite the disdain reflected in Soviet military pronouncements regarding the admissibility

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<sup>7</sup>The essence of this concern has been succinctly stated by David Holloway in his observation that it takes two sides to play the game of limitation, and that recent Soviet negative reactions to the U.S. selective options policy raise serious questions as to whether we can count on Soviet compliance ("Soviet Strategists Attack Schlesinger," *The New Scientist*, November 5, 1974, p. 707). However, despite its attempt to develop a capability for flexible nuclear response, the United States still retains both the hardware requisites and SIOP-scale attack options to play the massive-war game envisioned by Soviet military doctrine. A point frequently overlooked is that the development of strategic targeting selectivity in no way commits us to limited nuclear use nor requires an expectation that the Soviets will comply with the norm of restraint. This policy merely provides a standing contingency capability for coping with a nuclear shooting engagement that occurs unexpectedly and appears amenable to restraints aimed at turning the situation around before everything goes up in smoke.

and practicality of limitation in nuclear warfare, Soviet political leaders are capable of strategic improvisation in crises. In circumstances in which they would have *incentives* for limitations, there is no reason for believing that they would be precommitted by--or feel obliged to follow--their publicly enunciated nuclear doctrine.

The critical question for U.S. nuclear planners is not so much *how* Soviet doctrine differs from the current thrust of U.S. policy as *to what extent* this doctrinal asymmetry might affect (and possibly limit) U.S. options in a crisis. Obviously, how and to what degree doctrine would govern actual Soviet behavior in such a crisis is another thorny question that does not lend itself to abstract answers. Undoubtedly it would depend on the nature of the crisis, the stakes involved, the relative risk-taking propensities of the two sides, which side crossed the nuclear threshold first (against which targets and with what intensity), and a host of similar contingent circumstances. Soviet military doctrine serves many functions besides prescribing waging strategies for the Soviet political-military leadership. Accordingly, it may not reflect a totally accurate picture of how the Soviets would actually act on the unexplored terrain of a future nuclear contest of wills in which Soviet survival lay at stake.

It is the purpose of this report to sort out some of these various questions and considerations, with a view to clarifying the opportunities and constraints that Soviet doctrine may imply for the evolving U.S. strategy of selective targeting. It will examine current Soviet military thought as it bears on the issue of limitation, outline the critical asymmetries between U.S. and Soviet perspectives on the issue, explore the extent to which those asymmetries may have practical meaning and relevance, and suggest some implications of this doctrinal chasm for U.S. selective options planning. The origins, intent, and principal themes of the U.S. selective options strategy are examined as a background against which to set forth the critical differences held by Soviet military thinkers. Current U.S. nuclear policy guidance, after all, has been a subject of widespread public misunderstanding ever since it was first formally enunciated; and the strategic "debate" that has subsequently unfolded in the press, in the Congress, and in the scientific

and academic communities has involved much controversy over false issues. Although it is obviously impossible to explore all the details of the new targeting guidance, there is enough evidence in the public domain to rectify some of the more egregious popular misconceptions regarding that guidance and to untangle much of the confusion regarding what it does (and does not) entail.

Soviet commentary on nuclear strategy has characteristically emanated almost exclusively from professional military men. That of the United States, by contrast, has come primarily from civilian spokesmen. Are these dissimilar sources of declaratory policy directly comparable as functional counterparts? The idea of limited nuclear operations has been embraced with anything but uniform enthusiasm throughout the U.S. military establishment. It is quite likely that the formal principles of Soviet military doctrine are not universally shared by the Soviet civilian leadership. Nonetheless, the public enunciations of the flexible options strategy in the United States and the principles of Soviet military doctrine in the USSR represent official national policies and stand endorsed by their political leaders. It seems appropriate to treat them as legitimate analogs for the purposes of this analysis.

## II. THE EMERGING U.S. STRATEGY OF SELECTIVE NUCLEAR TARGETING

Nuclear policy in the United States has recently been undergoing perhaps its most radical transformation since the early days of the Kennedy-McNamara era. Although it happens to coincide with a period of vigorous R&D activity in the realm of strategic offensive weaponry, this policy shift is not tied to the introduction of new systems into the U.S. force structure. It principally involves the development of an explicit set of force-application concepts aimed at extracting additional political and strategic usefulness from the *existing* U.S. strategic posture. At its core is an effort to depart from total reliance on the threat of "assured destruction" retaliation that dominated U.S. deterrence efforts throughout the past decade and to create a variegated menu of targeting options (some massive and others carefully measured and discriminatory) to provide the U.S. NCA with a range of alternatives for varying crisis situations and nuclear deterrence breakdowns.

This policy reorientation has been referred to as the "Schlesinger retargeting doctrine." The label is misleading for two reasons. First, the policy shift involves a good deal more than simple retargeting of U.S. strategic offensive forces. Second, although the policy was indeed initiated under the guidance of former Secretary Schlesinger and continues to bear his intellectual imprint, its genesis substantially predated his arrival in office and reflected a background of growing disenchantment with the "assured destruction" formula throughout the U.S. national security community.

### ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION OF THE SELECTIVE OPTIONS POLICY

The concept of selective nuclear targeting is scarcely new to American strategic thought. Its intellectual foundations were laid down during the initial groundswell of American strategic theorizing and have been steadily advanced in the professional strategic literature ever since.<sup>8</sup> What is novel about the concept is that for the first

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<sup>8</sup> See, in particular, Klaus Knorr and Thornton Read (eds.), *Limited Strategic War*, Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1962. This remarkable



time it is also being seriously embraced by the official U.S. strategic policymaking community and formally incorporated into U.S. nuclear contingency planning. Previous U.S. nuclear contingency plans were not wholly insensate in their envisaged destructiveness nor wholly indiscriminate in their range of target coverage. Nor did previous U.S. administrations remain inattentive to the potential usefulness of selective targeting options. On the contrary, considerable official energies were expended throughout the McNamara years to develop alternative weapons laydown options for alternative contingencies, and the SIOP has long comprised more than merely one huge retaliatory package. Also, the United States has long had the basic hardware and C<sup>3</sup> prerequisites to develop ad hoc excursions from the SIOP in potential crises. However, these latent U.S. capabilities for improvising strike options were never previously translated into actual contingency plans, and all the various SIOP sub-options were exclusively tailored for general-war rather than limited-war contingencies. As former Secretary Schlesinger put the distinction, past U.S. options, whatever their specific target sets, "have involved relatively massive responses. Rather than massive options, we now want to provide the President with a wider set of much more selective targeting options."<sup>9</sup>

Official interest in the potential usefulness of a flexible strategic strike capability has, in turn, sparked a renaissance of sorts within the defense intellectual community. After nearly a decade of preoccupation with the Vietnam War and desensitization by the rhetoric of "mutual assured destruction," they have returned to consideration

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volume has stood up quite well over the years and remains highly instructive as a source of analytic commentary on selective targeting and intrawar deterrence. See also Herman Kahn, *On Escalation*, Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1965.

<sup>9</sup> Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger, *Annual Defense Department Report, FY 1975*, March 5, 1974, p. 4. For a detailed unclassified discussion of the evolution of the SIOP since the early McNamara years and a well-informed analysis of continuity and changes in U.S. strategic targeting policy from McNamara to Schlesinger, see Desmond Ball, *DoD/Vu: The Return to Counterforce in the Nixon Administration*, California Seminar on Arms Control and Foreign Policy, Santa Monica, 1974.

of (and controversy over) the alternatives available for coping with a potential deterrence failure.<sup>10</sup>

The roots of current U.S. planning of flexible strategic options run back to the early years of the Nixon Administration, when the U.S.-Soviet SALT dialog was first getting under way and official "new looks" were being cast at all aspects of U.S. foreign and strategic policy. Under the instructions of President Nixon in 1969 (partly inspired by the sobering experience of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia the previous year), the U.S. national security community temporarily shelved its incipient SALT plans and set about responding to National Security Council directives for a reexamination of the adequacy and shortcomings of U.S. strategic concepts and capabilities. Although the initial reports generated by these National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) directives did not fully crystallize the new targeting policy, they were instrumental in planting the first seeds of official doubt about the "sufficiency" of a deterrent posture based almost exclusively on the threat of indiscriminate nuclear retaliation against Soviet urban-industrial centers.<sup>11</sup> Indicative of this growing unease was the rhetorical question initially raised in President Nixon's 1970 Foreign Policy statement whether the U.S. NCA should be left with the stark choice of blindly destroying Soviet cities should nuclear deterrence fail and an attack on U.S. military targets ensue--a question that became emphatically answered in the negative in subsequent Presidential "state of the world" reports.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>For one of the earlier ventures in this direction, see Colin S. Gray, "The Second Wave: New Directions in Strategic Studies," *RUSI Journal*, December 1973, pp. 35-41. See also the compendium of articles dealing with various aspects of the selective targeting policy published in *Orbis*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, Fall 1974.

<sup>11</sup>See Ball, *Déjà Vu*, p. 5 for a discussion of the seminal role of NSSM 3 in this respect. Other relevant NSSMs are noted in John P. Leacacos, "Kissinger's Apparatus," *Foreign Policy*, No. 5, Winter 1971-1972, pp. 3-27.

<sup>12</sup>The precise formulation read as follows: "Should a President, in the event of a nuclear attack, be left with the single option of ordering the mass destruction of enemy civilians, in the face of the certainty that it would be followed by the mass slaughter of Americans?" *U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970s: A New Strategy for Peace*, February

By mid-1973, although still within the private councils of government, the new targeting concept had largely departed the realm of detached study and became an embryonic national policy. Major analyses within the defense community explored the rationale for the concept and its feasibility. James Schlesinger had become Secretary of Defense, bringing with him strong intellectual sympathies for the idea of targeting flexibility and a determination to see the concept translated into policy. In the international arena, the new Soviet strategic programs that surfaced in the aftermath of the détente euphoria sparked by SALT I began to raise doubts in the United States about underlying Soviet strategic intentions and to generate suspicions (even in the minds of SALT I supporters) about the possibility of a low-key Soviet drive for "superiority" within the force-level constraints of the 1972 Interim Agreement. As if the growing general discomfiture within and outside the government over the rigidities of the "mutual assured destruction" dogma were not enough, the rich menu of Soviet targeting options implied by the new Soviet MIRVed ICBMs clearly indicated that the classic SIOP-level response might be dangerously inappropriate to many U.S.-Soviet nuclear engagement scenarios and punctuated the need for a broader range of preplanned U.S. response options. Finally, although it came too late to have been an instrumental factor in molding the new targeting policy, Soviet complicity in bringing about the October 1973 Middle East War, and the momentary confrontation of U.S. and Soviet power and resolve it triggered, appeared to many in the United States as both proof of new-found Soviet assertiveness and confirmation of the need for a more credible and adaptable U.S. strategic response capability. Thus in January 1974, Secretary Schlesinger publicly announced that "a change in targeting strategy" had begun to take place in U.S. nuclear contingency planning, in which reflexive reprisal against cities was not only

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18, 1970, p. 92. By 1972, this question had become supplanted by the categorical assertion that a "simple 'assured destruction' doctrine does not meet . . . requirements for a flexible range of strategic options." *U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970s: The Emerging Structure of Peace*, February 9, 1972, p. 158.

"no longer the only option but also possibly not even the principal option" available to the President.<sup>13</sup>

The new policy did not signal a radical break from past targeting practices, for Schlesinger made it clear that the U.S. SIOP had always included a heavy loading of military aim points on its various target lists. Where it did depart from the previous policy was in selectivity, adaptability, and emphasis. The previous policy was almost exclusively oriented toward punitive retaliation following a massive Soviet strike against U.S. military and economic-administrative targets and consisted--even in its smallest targeting packages--of preplanned weapon laydowns numbering in the thousands.<sup>14</sup> The new policy concerned itself with the added possibility of lesser Soviet attacks and sought to supplement the basic SIOP with both a range of preplanned "limited nuclear options" (LNOs) and the necessary real-time retargeting capabilities and command and control support to permit the NCA to improvise strike options tailored to the unique demands of the situation *during* a crisis.

#### INADEQUACIES OF THE "ASSURED DESTRUCTION" POLICY

The current effort to increase the breadth and flexibility of U.S.

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Getler, "U.S. Studies Retargeting of Missiles," *The Washington Post*, January 11, 1974. See also John W. Finney, "U.S. Says It Is Retargeting Some Missiles Under a New Strategic Concept," *The New York Times*, January 11, 1974; and Edgar Ulsamer, "The Pentagon Looks at New Strategic Options," *Air Force Magazine*, February 1974. The new policy that Schlesinger enunciated was formally initiated by President Nixon. For a cursory discussion of some of the background events leading up to it, see George Sherman, "Nuclear Strategy and Schlesinger," *Washington Star-News*, April 15, 1974. A detailed and authoritative study of the origins, evolution, and content of the flexible options policy may be found in Lynn Etheridge Davis, *Limited Nuclear Options: Deterrence and the New American Doctrine*, Adelphi Paper No. 121, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 1976.

<sup>14</sup> As Secretary Schlesinger put it in Congressional testimony, the new targeting strategy is aimed less at establishing a U.S. counter-military capability *de novo* than at attempting to refine a clumsy one that has, in principle, long existed: "In the past, we have had massive preplanned strikes in which one would be dumping literally thousands of weapons on the Soviet Union. It was virtually indistinguishable from an attack on cities. . . . What the change in targeting does is give the President . . . the option of limiting strikes down to a few weapons." Quoted in *Aerospace Daily*, April 12, 1974.

nuclear targeting options is the cutting edge of a broader attempt, practically unprecedented in our history as a nuclear power, to infuse U.S. nuclear planning with an explicit and systematic ingredient of *strategy*. Despite (or perhaps because of) its frequency in discussions of national security policy, "strategy" has become one of the most misused and devalued terms of modern American strategic discourse. By traditional definition, "strategy" connotes a carefully developed and formalized set of concepts for coping with the eventuality of war and is aimed at ensuring national survival and the preservation of those values over which the war is presumably being fought. This definition makes it difficult to say that the United States has ever really had a coherent strategy for dealing with the upper end of the conflict spectrum. To be sure, we have had a whole succession of plans for the *deterrence* of nuclear war, some of them quite excruciatingly attentive to operational military details. But those plans, characteristically mislabeled "strategies," have been little more than static procedures maintained for ready execution to frighten our adversary from going to war in the first place. In effect, until quite recently we have elected to hang our national security planning on the peg of deterrence. In the process, we have paid little heed to the requirements for coping with a deterrence breakdown, precisely that eventuality for which strategy is supposed to exist.

Fixation on the imperatives of deterring war at the expense of those measures necessary for dealing with it and surviving is readily apparent in the traditional terms of reference used in discussing nuclear policy issues. Stability requirements, first-strike threats, and second-strike criteria were discussed as though they were the sole issues of national security planning. In contrast, such topics as third strikes, fourth strikes, intrawar bargaining, and war termination short of mutual annihilation were conspicuously absent from the rhetoric of U.S. defense policy. Preoccupation with the deterrent role of strategic power in U.S. defense planning has stemmed in part from a pervasive acceptance of what Herman Kahn has called the "modal thermonuclear-war paradigm"--that any nuclear conflict will likely begin with (or rapidly escalate to) a massive Soviet strike against CONUS for which a similarly

massive U.S. reprisal against the Soviet Union would be the only appropriate response.<sup>15</sup> It has also derived in part from powerful convictions within the U.S. military that the formulation and declaration of lesser nuclear retaliatory options would weaken the credibility of the U.S. deterrent, possibly invite a Soviet counterforce attack during an intense nuclear crisis, dilute the effectiveness of the SIOP as a military counterattack, and thereby risk placing the United States on the "losing" end so far as comparative societal damage and residual strategic weapons were concerned. Whatever the explanation, the policy of "mutual assured destruction" until recently was the linchpin of official American strategic doctrine.

Recognition of this lopsided preoccupation, and an effort to correct it, lie at the heart of the current U.S. selective targeting activity. Although commonly called a "strategy," "assured destruction" was by itself an antithesis of strategy.<sup>16</sup> Unlike any strategy that ever preceded it throughout the history of armed conflict, it ceased to be useful precisely where military strategy is supposed to come into effect: at the edge of war. It posited that the principal mission of the U.S. military under conditions of ongoing nuclear operations against CONUS was to shut its eyes, grit its teeth, and reflexively unleash an indiscriminate and simultaneous reprisal against all Soviet aim points on a preestablished target list. Rather than deal in a considered way with the particular attack at hand so as to minimize further damage to the United States and maximize the possibility of an early settlement on reasonably acceptable terms, it had the simple goal of inflicting punishment for the Soviet transgression. Not only did this reflect an implicit repudiation of political responsibility, it also risked provoking just the sort of counterreprisal against the United States that a rational wartime strategy should attempt to prevent.

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<sup>15</sup> Herman Kahn, "Issues of Thermonuclear War Termination," *The Annals*, November 1970, p. 136.

<sup>16</sup> It did not, of course, start out that way. The "assured destruction" formula was originally developed merely as a sizing criterion for U.S. strategic force structure planning. It later became enshrined, however, as a preferred objective of strategic retaliatory targeting.

Three key arguments have been voiced against the policy of "assured destruction":

1. *A survivable countervalue retaliation capability is a necessary but not sufficient condition for meeting the complex requirements of U.S. security.* Doubtless it is indispensable as a deterrent against a large-scale and coldly premeditated Soviet nuclear attack against CONUS "out of the blue." Yet, by itself, it is ill-suited to coping with the needs of U.S. security if its deterrent function should fail. Although the "assured destruction" option is perfectly acceptable and rational as a peacetime deterrent *threat*, it could be suicidal as a wartime military *strategy* if the Soviets were brazen enough to dismiss it as a hollow bluff or were otherwise, through accident or miscalculation, to initiate limited nuclear strikes against the U.S. ZI. Indiscriminate unleashing of nuclear reprisals against Soviet urban-industrial resources in response to a less than "total" Soviet attack on the United States would not only be militarily and politically inappropriate but would risk triggering a punitive Soviet counterreprisal against U.S. cities.

2. *Precisely because of its inappropriateness and its likelihood of being dysfunctional in such a situation, the "assured destruction" option would also tend to lack credibility when it was most needed, namely during an intense and rapidly escalating U.S.-Soviet confrontation of wills in which the Soviet leadership had major values at stake and was willing to run high risks to protect them.* This elementary but long-neglected point is clearly set forth in the FY 1976 Defense Department Posture Statement:

While we tend to talk of deterrence as though it were in continuous operation, it is doubtful if the leaders of the great nuclear powers ask themselves on a daily basis whether they feel deterred. It is only in circumstances of confrontation and crisis that the credibility of the deterrent comes under test. At that point, what may have seemed like a plausible threat under normal conditions may appear grossly inadequate or inappropriate to the situation at hand.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger, *Annual Defense Department Report*, FY 1976, February 5, 1975, p. II-1.

In such a situation, the credibility of the U.S. "assured destruction" retaliatory threat might come under question not only by the Soviets (thereby leading to a breakdown of strategic deterrence) but, more important, by the U.S. NCA (producing U.S. self-deterrence under duress and thereby acquiescence through inaction, where a more measured and purposeful military response capability might permit a significantly improved outcome).

3. *A strategic response policy centered almost exclusively on the massive "assured destruction" retaliatory option, by preoccupying itself with war prevention at the expense of war-waging and crisis extrication, implicitly reflects both overreliance on the durability of deterrence and an assumption that the adversary's behavior will always be rational.*<sup>18</sup> Although the current U.S.-Soviet strategic balance is widely (and with good reason) acknowledged to be highly stable, there is nothing automatic about the deterrence upon which that stability rests. The Soviets might remain deterred from preemptively unleashing their equivalent of the SIOP in most imaginable crisis situations. Yet through a perception of flagging U.S. resolve and a consequent estimate that a major nuclear initiative on their part would not trigger the threatened "assured destruction" response, they might find themselves with sufficient determination and self-assurance to forget deterrence and proceed with an attack. That would place the onus of decision on the U.S. NCA either to carry out our threat or attempt to regroup and improvise under duress while risking a Soviet *fait accompli*. Moreover, U.S. deterrence could fail at many levels below the massive attack threshold. Short of the classic annihilating attempt against U.S. retaliatory forces and sociopolitical cohesion, the Soviet leaders in certain scenarios could (a) preempt massively with nuclear weapons throughout the European theater and leave the U.S. homeland untouched, (b) couple that option with a major attack against selected military targets in CONUS relevant to the immediate European theater engagement, and (c) reinforce their sub-SIOP nuclear initiatives with credible

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<sup>18</sup> For a cogent elaboration of this theme, see Fred C. Iklé, "Can Nuclear Deterrence Last Out the Century?" *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 51, No. 2, January 1973, pp. 267-285.



threats that U.S. escalation to the SIOP (or "assured destruction") level would expose U.S. society to unrestrained reprisal by fully alerted and undegraded Soviet strategic forces. Finally, deterrence at the strategic level could fail in a whole assortment of unpredictable ways ranging from accident, inadvertence, and unintended collapse of Soviet command and control to misestimation of U.S. responses or outright madness of the Soviet political leadership.

All of these contingencies are extraordinarily unlikely. Yet they are not impossible, and they require careful and systematic consideration. Any one of them would involve a clear invalidation of the U.S. "assured destruction" option through failure to prevent such Soviet nuclear initiatives in the first place. As one commentator on contemporary strategic affairs has caustically put it, an "assured destruction" policy without the necessary fallback options in the event it should get derailed would be "unsafe at any speed."<sup>19</sup> Once a Soviet nuclear attack on CONUS or NATO had already occurred, such a policy would lack credibility during an intense crisis *short* of the nuclear threshold and might thereby risk precisely the sort of Soviet adventurism it was designed to prevent. In a relevant analogy some years ago, Herman Kahn pointed out that a well-designed building must be engineered not only to stand up under ordinary conditions of sunshine and calm but also to endure the unlikely but not impossible stresses of a hurricane. The "assured destruction" formula provided the United States during the past decade with an adequate peacetime deterrent in a largely benign U.S.-Soviet political-military relationship. How such a deterrent would hold up under the improbable but consequential turbulence of a future showdown between the superpowers is subject to considerable uncertainty. It is in an attempt to reduce that uncertainty, however marginally, and to invest in U.S. nuclear contingency planning for a potential test that the current U.S. search for new targeting options--indeed for a coherent and politically meaningful U.S. nuclear *strategy*--is being conducted.

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<sup>19</sup> Colin S. Gray, "Unsafe at Any Speed: A Critique of Stable Deterrence Doctrine," *RUSI Journal*, June 1973, pp. 23-27.

SOME PREVALENT MYTHS ABOUT THE NEW TARGETING GUIDANCE

One criticism frequently voiced is that the selective options policy merely seeks to resurrect in modern-day dress the abortive "no-cities" nuclear targeting policy briefly espoused by McNamara during the early 1960s. In part, this allegation has been unwittingly abetted by the language OSD spokesmen have used in articulating the new policy guidance. Through their frequent use of such terms as "retargeting," "limitation," "counterforce," and so on, they have conjured up images of the highly ritualized model of strategic warfare that implicitly informed much of the "city-avoidance" strategic thinking of the early McNamara era. That thinking postulated that by informing the Soviets in advance that we were consciously targeting--at least as an initial measure--only their military resources, we would give them every incentive to reciprocate our restraint and might thereby increase the possibility that a nuclear war, were it to occur, would not inevitably entail the ultimate destruction of the two countries as organized societies.

Current U.S. targeting policy, by contrast, is based on a fundamentally different set of strategic premises and assumptions. For one thing, McNamara broached his "no cities" proposal at a time of overwhelming U.S. strategic superiority. At the time of McNamara's Ann Arbor speech, the United States had a nearly four-to-one numerical edge over the Soviets in ICBM strength. We also faced a Soviet adversary who had deployed no significant SLBM force, and whose few ICBMs were deployed in highly vulnerable soft-site launch configurations. Given that imbalance, we were able to target most of the Soviet retaliatory force with confidence and thus possessed something exceedingly close to a "not-incredible" nuclear first-strike capability.

McNamara's "city-avoidance" strategy, heavily predicated on U.S. superiority, was a "damage-limiting" strategy that envisaged both massive targeting of Soviet strategic forces and the possibility the United States might launch first.<sup>20</sup> In effect, it attempted to have

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<sup>20</sup> Although official Defense Department pronouncements understandably avoided calling attention to this theme, it could scarcely have been missed by any attentive observer of the McNamara policy. As one

the best of all plausible worlds: (a) to "educate" the Soviets into understanding and accepting the reasonableness of our strategy in their own interests, (b) to invest U.S. nuclear policy with the principle of noncombatant immunity stressed by the classical "just war" doctrine, and (c) to provide the United States with a credible war-waging formula in the event of a deterrence failure by eliminating the Soviet Union's ability to inflict substantial retaliatory damage on U.S. society while discouraging them from even *attempting* such retaliation with any forces they might retain following the initial attack. It was a bold and imaginative strategy while it lasted, but it was doomed to failure by the Soviet refusal to accept its "rules of engagement" and, more important, by the steady growth of survivable Soviet retaliatory forces. By 1966, those forces had become sizable enough to deprive the strategy of its plausible counterforce first-strike potential.

The McNamara strategy was "restrained" only in the sense that it sought to exclude the targeting of cities in the initial exchange and in fact was a massive and ambitious "damage-limiting" design aimed at providing the United States a chance for significant military victory in nuclear war. Current U.S. targeting policy reflects a conservative and "satisficing" strategy in the extreme. Recognizing the high survivability of the current Soviet nuclear retaliatory potential, it makes no pretense of seeking a credible first-strike disarming capability and explicitly rules out such an objective as being, for the present, technologically unattainable. Moreover, the current policy does not entail any attempt to "educate" the Soviets into accepting and conforming to American strategic logic. If anything, it envisions the possibility that the *Soviets* might initiate a sub-SIOP attack in certain circumstances, thereby putting the burden of improvising an appropriate military response on us.

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McNamara aide reportedly observed, "there could be no such thing as primary retaliation against military targets after an enemy attack. If you're going to shoot at missiles, you're talking about a first strike." Quoted in Henry L. Trewhitt, *McNamara: His Ordeal in the Pentagon*, Harper and Row, New York, 1971, p. 115. An even more authoritative intimation to this effect was held out in a public assertion by President Kennedy that "Khrushchev must *not* be certain that, where its vital interests are threatened, the United States will never strike first." *Newsweek*, April 9, 1962, p. 32.

A more widespread misconception about the policy holds that it entails an abandonment of the supposedly tried and proved concept of "deterrence" in favor of a highly risk-prone and provocative strategy of nuclear "war-fighting." Although this view lacks foundation either in logic or in fact, and indeed is explicitly repudiated at numerous points throughout Secretary Schlesinger's FY 1976 Posture Statement, it has been elevated almost to a level of ritual incantation by congressional and journalistic critics of the policy since it was initially made public.<sup>21</sup> This perspective reflects a misapprehension on the part of its proponents that the United States has shifted from predominantly countercity to predominantly countermilitary targeting (which, as we shall see presently, it has not). In its more polemical variants, it implies that the U.S. government has accepted nuclear war as an alternative of national policy. Incredible as it may seem, Herbert Scoville has lamented that "we now propose to respond to Soviet aggression by attacking a variety of military targets instead of by massive retaliation against cities," as though the latter were somehow a more sensible option. Although he may be right in asserting that it is "probably more moral to prevent slaughter by threatening disaster than to facilitate limited death and destruction,"<sup>22</sup> it hardly follows that *inflicting* disaster is the morally preferred response in a situation where deterrence, despite our best efforts, has failed.

On the contrary, as Albert Wohlstetter has trenchantly observed, exclusive reliance on the threat of "assured destruction" retaliation in the blind hope that its very repugnance will make the contingency of nuclear war go away, "is exorcism and moralizing rather than deliberation or morality. We cannot assure that a nuclear war will never

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<sup>21</sup>The following is representative of the genre: "The Senate defense policy debate raises disturbing questions about U.S. strategic thinking that go far beyond the immediate issue of permitting development of a new generation of super-accurate nuclear warheads. . . . At stake is nothing less than the danger of a shift from a policy of deterrence to one of accepting the possibility of war." ("U.S. War Policy Shift?" *Chicago Sun-Times*, June 10, 1975.) Acceptance of the possibility of war is what deterrence has always been about. It certainly does not mean that war is a preferred alternative to peace.

<sup>22</sup>Herbert Scoville, "Flexible MADness," *Foreign Policy*, No. 4, Spring 1974, pp. 164, 177.

occur simply by repeating that it would be an unlimited catastrophe. And we cannot eliminate the possibility of nuclear war simply by *assuring* that if it occurs it *will* be an unmitigated catastrophe. We may instead make it more likely, and may make almost certain that if it occurs, it will be more brutal and more terrible than was necessary." Moreover, it has yet to be demonstrated that having recourse to selective response options short of the full SIOP "wargasm" will indeed, as Scoville alleges, "facilitate limited death and destruction." It is a caricature of current U.S. policy to depict it as a "little nuclear war" looking for a place to happen. Whatever its deficiencies, that policy is no more intended to allow U.S. leaders to go out on the war-path actively seeking opportunities for using nuclear weapons than the presence of life preservers aboard ocean liners is intended to allow passengers to jump overboard whenever the idea strikes their fancy. Rather, it is merely an attempt to develop last-ditch alternatives to inflexible reliance on an indiscriminate population-killing strategy, which, as Wohlstetter notes, "calls for a course of action under every circumstance of attack that makes sense in none."<sup>23</sup>

Most of the apprehension about the flexible options policy derives from oversimplified or incorrect views of the previous policy. It is easy to see how the displacement of the term "mutual deterrence" by "selective targeting options" in recent U.S. policy pronouncements could appear as a signal that U.S. strategic *objectives* have changed. "Deterrence" of nuclear war, whatever label one may attach to it, remains the overriding objective of current U.S. strategic planning. What is different about the new policy and sets it apart from its "assured destruction" predecessor is its explicit insistence that deterrence cannot be automatically guaranteed and that we have an obligation to find rational and effective measures for dealing with the possibility of its failure. The selective targeting policy in no way involves an undoing of the "assured destruction" retaliatory threat. On the contrary, the FY 1976 Posture Statement strongly reaffirms the continued

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<sup>23</sup> Albert Wohlstetter, "Threats and Promises of Peace: Europe and America in the New Era," *Orbis*, Vol. XVII, No. 4, Winter 1974, p. 1126.

need for "a highly survivable force that can be withheld at all times and targeted against the economic base of an opponent so as to deter coercive or desperation attacks on the economic and population targets of the United States and its allies." The basic strike package that provides this "assured destruction" component--the SIOP--remains as fully in force as it ever did, and there is no intention whatever of doing away with the "massive retaliation" option it embodies.

Where current U.S. nuclear policy *does* depart from its predecessors is in its belief that although we cannot ignore a massive attack that comes without warning, other contingencies are more likely and no single response is appropriate to them all. Accordingly, the policy maintains, the United States has a requirement

for strategic forces capable of providing more than the simple response of a limited or wholesale destruction of cities. . . . To threaten to blow up all of an opponent's cities, short of an attack on our cities, is hardly an acceptable strategy, and in most circumstances, the credibility of the threat would be close to zero, especially against a nation which could retaliate against our cities in kind.<sup>24</sup>

The policy grants the importance of a withheld "assured destruction" force to deter coercive attacks against U.S. cities, but it also stipulates that "we must surely go on to something else if our deterrent is to be credible over a wide range of contingencies."

Among the many contingencies short of an all-out Soviet attack against U.S. military and urban-industrial resources, the FY 1976 Posture Statement cites the following:

1. An accidental or unauthorized Soviet attack against the United States or its European allies.
2. A premeditated Soviet nuclear "shot across the bow" against one or more U.S. military installations, either in the theater or in the ZI, launched out of desperation or out of a desire

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<sup>24</sup> *Annual Defense Department Report*, FY 1976, pp. I-13, II-3.

to demonstrate Soviet determination during an escalating conventional war.

3. A preemptive Soviet disarming attack against the entire U.S. land-based ICBM and bomber force, aimed at drawing down the U.S. retaliatory capability while sparing major U.S. cities and allowing the Soviets to extract concessions without triggering the final holocaust.

Given the possibility of Soviet limited nuclear operations against which the "assured destruction" option would be inappropriate, current U.S. policy additionally calls for a force that "could implement a variety of limited preplanned options and react rapidly to retargeting orders so as to deter any range of additional attacks" that the Soviets might contemplate.<sup>25</sup> Far from *supplanting* the "assured destruction" option, current U.S. policy simply seeks to *supplement* it with additional options of lesser magnitude against possible contingencies in which a massive U.S. reprisal would be counterproductive. As Secretary Schlesinger put the point some years ago, the new targeting guidance seeks a means of carrying out the *least miserable* option in a situation where *all* options would be painful, yet where some (such as an indiscriminate unleashing of the full SIOP) would be far more painful than necessary. (Alternatively, as a Rand colleague has recently expressed it, what the policy attempts to assure--based on the premise that *any* nuclear use by either side would be a profound mistake--is that we would make the *best possible* mistake given the dismal mess both superpowers would be up to their necks in.)<sup>26</sup> Deterrence continues to be the policy's overwhelmingly dominant objective. But, unlike its predecessors, the policy seeks to be able (a) to deter not only massive attacks but more selective ones as well; (b) that unavailing, to meet a limited attack with a measured response designed to maintain U.S. involvement in the defense of its interests without having to cut off its nose to spite its face; (c) to exact a price for the Soviet transgression while deterring the Soviets from further escalation by the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. I-13.

<sup>26</sup> I am indebted to William Jones for this somber but sage observation.

coercive threat of inflicting even greater damage with withheld forces; and (d) *only with all of this failing*, to impose the ultimate sanction of a full SIOP retaliation designed to bring down the Soviet Union as a functioning national entity.

#### CONTENT AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SELECTIVE OPTIONS POLICY

At bottom, the emerging U.S. targeting policy seeks to serve two interrelated functions, one largely political and the other military-strategic.

The first and more important objective is the enhancement of U.S. deterrence credibility not only against a full-scale Soviet attack on CONUS but at all levels of the nuclear spectrum, both against CONUS and in possible local theaters of engagement. This function breaks down into two components: (a) prewar deterrence of *any* Soviet nuclear use, and that failing (b) intrawar deterrence of further Soviet nuclear use beyond that already undertaken by the two sides.

Both of these deterrence-enhancement functions require the development and visible projection of selective nuclear options at graduated levels of intensity below the SIOP threshold. These options must be controllable and rationally usable (thereby instilling in the U.S. NCA the confidence and resolve to carry them out if Soviet nuclear initiatives should force our hand). Further, they must be sufficiently credible to the Soviet leaders to disabuse them of any notions that a selective nuclear attack or other major military aggression on their part would go unanswered.

This quest for flexible response options is in no way based on any *expectation* that the Soviets are likely to initiate a selective nuclear attack against the United States. Indeed, anxiety that such an attack might ever actually occur is conspicuously absent from the Defense Department's public commentary on the policy. The major concern is the possibility that in some future environment where the Soviet Union might possess a wide variety of strategic forces and targeting options against the United States and its allies, during a crisis the Soviet leadership could attempt to use their threat potential for seeking political gains. By explicitly providing for selective



- reprisal options that would be appropriate to such Soviet initiatives, current U.S. policy aims to dampen in advance any Soviet enthusiasm for exercising such political-military muscle against the United States, and thereby to reduce Soviet proclivities for risk-taking.

The second objective of the selective options policy is to provide the U.S. NCA with some additional military targeting choices in a confrontation that, for whatever reason, developed into actual nuclear operations. Hitherto, the range of quick-response alternatives available to the U.S. leadership has been circumscribed by certain built-in rigidities of U.S. nuclear war planning that have inhibited the flexible use of the U.S. strategic posture. Theoretically, of course, the large number of diverse nuclear weapons and delivery systems available to the U.S. NCA has long provided the technical wherewithal for selective strategic targeting and limited strikes below the "assured destruction" level. In practice, however, that flexibility has not been effectively exploited by U.S. force-application doctrines.<sup>27</sup> U.S. nuclear contingency planning has traditionally been dominated by pre-planned and highly formalized attack options aimed at inflicting high levels of damage on the Soviet Union. These options have fallen into two broad planning categories: the Scheduled Strike Programs in SACEUR's Nuclear Operations Plan for theater nuclear warfare contingencies, and the SIOP for contingencies involving Soviet nuclear operations against the U.S. ZI. Although both of these plans have incorporated "withhold" options for intrawar deterrence and have included alternative strike packages consciously aimed at "selectivity" of sorts, the available options have all tended to be so highly institutionalized, so closely wedded to preestablished training routines, and--most important--so massive in execution as to deprive them of any practical element of limitation. At the same time, they have been almost totally unamenable

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<sup>27</sup> This is a point thoroughly missed by most of the critics of the selective targeting policy. Versatile weapons systems do not automatically confer "instant options" on their possessors, as though one merely need add water and stir. Such options must be rigorously worked out in a conscious process of painstaking and complex analysis and then systematically incorporated into strategic contingency plans and operational repertoires.

to improvisation. The SACEUR Nuclear Operations Plan not only commands the entire U.S./NATO nuclear strike force posture in Europe, with its full array of QRA aircraft and theater-based tactical nuclear missile forces, but also the U.K. POLARIS SSBN fleet and some U.S. POSEIDON SLBMs dedicated to European theater-war targeting tasks. The SIOP is the U.S. general nuclear war plan and draws on the entire U.S. Triad of ICBMs, SLBMs, and intercontinental bombers. And both, while consisting of alternative attack packages that reflect successive degrees of "limitation," entail weapons laydowns of such magnitude that their degrees of intensity would probably be indistinguishable to the Soviet leadership in the turmoil of an actual nuclear exchange.

The new targeting policy seeks to supplement these two essentially last-resort massive attack schemes with a variety of limited options upon which the U.S. NCA can selectively draw in the event of Soviet military actions insufficiently provocative to warrant an immediate uncorking of U.S. SIOP-scale attacks. It also seeks to provide the flexibility and resiliency in U.S. strategic forces and supporting C<sup>3</sup> systems necessary to provide the NCA with a chance to generate improvised response options during a crisis where *no* preplanned attack packages would be entirely appropriate.

In the realm of preplanned limited options, selective strike alternatives are being sought for both theater-war and intercontinental nuclear contingencies. In the theater-war context, former Secretary Schlesinger noted that the United States reserves the option to use nuclear weapons not only within the local zone of combat for military purposes but also directly against the Soviet Union to demonstrate U.S. determination and to signal the gravity of U.S. concerns. He also reaffirmed the long-standing tenet of U.S. NATO policy that the United States would consider *initiating* the use of nuclear weapons if the exigencies of the theater conventional land battle required it.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See Oswald Johnson, "Schlesinger Seeks to Dispel Nuclear Policy Confusion," *Los Angeles Times*, July 2, 1975. The concept of first *use* of nuclear weapons (for demonstrative purposes or for *regaining* the military initiative in theater warfare) is in no way synonymous with the concept of first *strike* (generally regarded as meaning a massive counterforce disarming attack with strategic missiles against the

Although the details of such options have not been made public, former Deputy Assistant Defense Secretary Beecher gave some intimation of their general complexion when he suggested, during a press conference in 1974, that one appropriate target for a limited U.S. nuclear strike might be a Soviet forward-deployed nuclear weapons storage facility in East Germany. Another possible attack package, less demonstrative and more militarily useful, was indicated in his remark that the United States might also wish to have a capability for selectively destroying those Soviet MRBMs, IRBMs, and variable-range ICBMs targeted against Western Europe.<sup>29</sup>

At the intercontinental-war level, the FY 1976 DoD Posture Statement expressed concern that the Soviets might in certain circumstances become tempted to preempt against selected components of the U.S. Triad (specifically the MINUTEMAN force and U.S. alert bomber bases) to diminish U.S. abilities for controlled retaliation, with the expectation that the United States might refrain from significant reprisal. Against this contingency, it suggested that the United States might wish to retaliate against selected "soft" targets collocated with large Soviet population centers (requiring high accuracies and low yields for minimizing collateral damage) or to respond with limited attacks on withheld Soviet strategic forces such as ICBMs and IRBMs (requiring high accuracies and increased yields for maximizing kill probability).<sup>30</sup>

In both the theater-war and counter-ZI contexts, current U.S. contingency planning for limited nuclear operations does not mean that U.S. nuclear policy has displaced the rigid SIOP formula with an equally rigid concept of what "limitation" entails.<sup>31</sup> Although Secretary

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enemy's nuclear retaliatory forces). This important distinction has tended to be missed in much of the recent public debate over the current U.S. targeting policy.

<sup>29</sup>Quoted in Fred Emery, "United States Disclaims Any Plans for a Nuclear Weapons Design to Strike First," *The London Times*, March 1, 1974.

<sup>30</sup>*Annual Defense Department Report, FY 1976*, p. II-5.

<sup>31</sup>Of course this could eventually occur as the LNO planning community becomes increasingly institutionalized. Keeping the LNO planning environment free enough from bureaucratic processes and standard operating procedures for creative strategic imagination to flourish

Schlesinger noted during his incumbency that some of the limited options under development envisage strike packages of "three to five" weapons (in contrast to the thousand or more laydowns featured in the SIOP),<sup>32</sup> other Defense Department spokesmen have added that the overall targeting reorientation involves a wide-ranging development of responses "up and down the spectrum from one weapon all the way up to massive use of weapons."<sup>33</sup> The widespread use of the LNO acronym has led many to assume that the new policy strives for targeting "limitation" as an end in itself. The key themes involved in the policy, however, are not so much "limitation" and "restraint" as they are "flexibility," "selectivity," and "control." Some selective nuclear options may indeed be highly limited in scope and magnitude, designed for psychopolitical coercion and communicating resolve. Others, however, may be oriented toward the pursuit of military advantage during a controlled nuclear exchange. In fact, it is entirely plausible that some "limited" options at the upper end of this latter category might well look very much like the counterforce component of the current SIOP.

A case can be made that the ongoing development of preplanned selective strike options is little more than on-the-job training for a real nuclear crisis. Just as the SIOP would be inappropriate to most imaginable nuclear escalation situations, so might be the limited options generated to redress that problem. However varied U.S. preplanned LNOs may turn out to be, there is the strong possibility that in an actual nuclear crisis, the U.S. NCA would find none of these options attractive and would fall back on rapid intracrisis improvisation to patch together new alternatives that better served the needs of the moment. Yet even then, the ready availability of selective nuclear contingency plans--however unsuitable for use directly "off

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will require constant attention and effort. For an eloquent warning against the twin dangers of the "rigid pursuit of flexibility" and the "indiscriminate application of discrimination," see Pierre Hassner, "Détente and European Instabilities: Precision-Guided Diplomacy and Flexible Political Options," paper presented at a Conference on New Technologies and the Defense of Europe, Copenhagen, Denmark, September 15-16, 1975.

<sup>32</sup> George Sherman, "Nuclear Strategy and Schlesinger," *The Washington Star-News*, April 15, 1974.

<sup>33</sup> Fred Emery, *The London Times*, March 1, 1974.

the shelf"--would have the effect of providing the NCA with a substantial point of departure for improvisation. Even if the current development of "canned" limited options should lead only to a proliferation of "little SIOPs" that would have to be reconsidered in a crisis, it nonetheless (a) sensitizes the NCA to the range of targeting alternatives theoretically available; (b) enhances its appreciation of the capabilities and limitations of the U.S. force posture and C<sup>3</sup> systems for sub-SIOP operations; (c) educates military planners and operational units regarding the general nature of the selective targeting problem and alerts them to the kinds of alternative strike operations they may be called upon to generate and perform; and, accordingly, (d) improves the general resiliency and responsiveness of the U.S. strategic posture for carrying out novel targeting tasks should the NCA decide during a crisis that neither the SIOP nor the other pre-planned options were appropriate.<sup>34</sup>

#### PROBLEMS OF FORMULATION AND EXECUTION

Selective nuclear options entail formidable problems. Even the formulation of the SIOP has been no easy matter. The United States has a fixed number of strategic weapons available for carrying out the "assured destruction" retaliatory mission. Many of those weapons might well be taken out in a Soviet counterforce attack, leaving the United States with a highly degraded retaliatory arsenal. If "assured retaliation" is defined to mean a carefully planned and empirically substantiated eradication of a significant portion of the Soviet economic and political-administrative infrastructure, then some difficult choices have to be made regarding which targets are important, which have priority, and which weapons should be allocated to which aim points--all in a planning environment of uncertainty about the extent and ways the

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<sup>34</sup> For further discussion of these and related themes, see Thomas Schelling's "Comment" in Knorr and Read, *Limited Strategic War*, pp. 241-258. This brief essay, despite its publication well over a decade ago, remains a sensitive and penetrating treatment of problems and pitfalls associated with limited nuclear operations.

U.S. force might be drawn down by a preemptive Soviet attack.<sup>35</sup> But at least the SIOP enjoys the comparative luxury (if one can call it that) of being a "single, integrated" plan requiring little more than a Presidential order to be carried out. In this sense, it is analogous to a loaded and cocked machine gun, needing only a pull of the trigger to be fired.

Limited nuclear options are like an arsenal of weapons, some large and some small, some automatic and some single-action, some loaded and cocked, some loaded but not cocked, and others empty yet with a variety of available charges to be chosen from. Unlike the SIOP, selective strike options require the U.S. NCA to be keenly sensitive to the effect of the operation in drawing down U.S. forces, the appropriateness of the operation to immediate U.S. objectives, the clarity and "correctness" of the signal being communicated, and not least of all the way the operation might be interpreted and responded to by the Soviets.

The likelihood that such limited operations (and Soviet responses to them) would--barring explosive escalation to general war--take place over an extended period of time, with some forces actively engaged and

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<sup>35</sup> This is particularly true if the targeting objective involves systematically destroying critical Soviet economic and political-military power resources rather than simply killing Russian people in large numbers. The latter would be easy but strategically and politically pointless. The former could significantly draw down the Soviet Union's postwar power status relative to that of the United States but places much more stringent demands on SIOP planners in terms of required targeting flexibility and numbers of surviving retaliatory forces. There are indications that U.S. countervalue targeting doctrine is increasingly moving in this latter direction, a trend scarcely likely to make the SIOP planner's job any easier. As William Van Cleave and Roger Barnett have noted: "In view of President Nixon's charge that measuring population fatalities is inconsistent with American values, and similar comments by Secretary Schlesinger, we may now prefer to judge the adequacy of the assured destruction capability with regard not so much to population fatalities and urban destruction as to objectives of greater political-military relevance to a war and its aftermath--such as (a) reduction of the enemy's military capability both to prosecute the war and to exert postwar power beyond his borders (or, for that matter, to maintain domestic control and protect his own borders), (b) destruction of elements critical to his post-attack recovery capability, and (c) disruption of political control mechanisms." "Strategic Adaptability," *Orbis*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, Fall 1976, pp. 666-667.

others withheld for intrawar deterrence, has some important implications for U.S. command and control, intelligence, and surveillance requirements. Traditional SIOP planning has been predicated on the assumption that strategic attack operations following the issuance of a Presidential emergency action message would take place automatically in accordance with carefully preplanned instructions. It has not placed a great premium on post-H-hour communications between the NCA and the attacking forces. Successful execution and management of limited nuclear operations would require not only a more survivable and resilient C<sup>3</sup> system than we may now have, but also substantially enhanced U.S. capabilities for attack assessment, battle management, real-time intelligence collection, and real-time retargeting of forces. Indeed, some of the principal R&D implications of the new targeting guidance may lie less in the realm of accuracy improvements and other hardware-related innovations than in the "softer" cybernetic arena of enhancing information flow, data cycle time, and general NCA flexibility for conducting controlled and highly disciplined force application.

To illustrate some of the planning dilemmas the NCA would face in devising and carrying out an LNO, let us postulate a European theater war in which things are going badly for NATO and the U.S. NCA decides to raise the stakes by launching a demonstrative nuclear attack on a Soviet rear-area support facility in the Western portion of the Soviet ZI. Let us further assume that the President would prefer to use only a single delivery vehicle so as to leave no room for Soviet doubt that the operation was consciously being limited. At first glance, an ICBM would appear to be the obvious weapon for such an assignment. Yet it could also be dangerous because being launched directly from CONUS, it might give the Soviets the unintended impression that the United States had embarked on full-fledged intercontinental war. In such a situation, the President might instead wish to use an aircraft delivery system, such as a forward-deployed FB-111 rotated from its main operating base in the United States and launched out of England. Such an alternative might appear particularly attractive because the FB-111 could perhaps be perceived by the adversary as being somewhat more consonant with the notion of "extended theater war" than an ICBM or SLBM. On the

other hand, the FB-111 would have to confront a fully alerted and undegraded Soviet air defense network, and the U.S. NCA would accordingly have to ask whether a single aircraft could successfully penetrate to the assigned target. If it turned out that multiple sorties of aircraft using nuclear SRAM attacks en route for defense suppression would have to be dispatched to assure a high-confidence FB-111 strike, the *image* of the operation in Soviet eyes might begin to look altogether different from what the U.S. NCA intended, notwithstanding the limited and discriminating *objective* of the mission.<sup>36</sup> Given such a dilemma, what sort of choice would the President make? The answer is by no means clear. There can be no mistaking the considerable operational and political difficulties he would have to confront.

Although selective strike options may entail thorny (and perhaps insoluble) problems for the NCA that do not burden SIOP planners, efforts to develop such options are not necessarily foreordained to be fruitless. It is all too easy for analysts close to the problem to become so prepossessed with technical matters as to forget that selective options also have an important *deterrent* function.<sup>37</sup> Even though

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<sup>36</sup>This presumes, of course, that the President and his principal advisors would have sufficient knowledge of operational matters to *think* about asking such a question. Even then, arriving at a decision would be no easy matter. But one can imagine a far worse alternative. Suppose the NCA was completely untutored in operational matters and the President simply directed CINCSAC to deliver one weapon on the assigned target with an FB-111. If the President did not know that the textbook prescription for such an operation indeed did call for multiple sorties and SRAM launches against en route defenses to assure the arrival of one aircraft over the target, standard operating procedure could easily provoke a Soviet response that might well have been avoided. This hypothetical example indicates the critical importance of having an NCA sufficiently expert in the practical details of nuclear force application to make responsible decisions in a nuclear crisis.

<sup>37</sup>To repeat, reinforcement of deterrence below the spasm war threshold is the *primary* purpose underlying the current American selective options policy. "It is necessary for us to maintain a worldwide military balance and a deterrent posture that offers no temptations to anybody, that precludes vacuums. By changing our targeting doctrine . . . in view of deficiencies that have been uncovered in the pre-existing doctrine, we feel that we are enhancing deterrence" (News conference by Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger, January 24, 1974, p. 2). Although having a broader range of preplanned attack



the development of LNOs may remain perpetually saddled with imponderables and incommensurables, merely *having* the options and making their existence explicit may encourage Soviet circumspection in future crises. Given the axiom that all doctrines are merely points of departure for improvisation once war actually begins, preplanned limited options would also provide the NCA with the advantage of having systematically *thought* about the problem and having provided itself with the conceptual raw materials necessary for any improvisation it might contemplate.

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options will provide the U.S. NCA with substantially greater maneuvering room in a nuclear crisis than it has ever had before, the simple possession of such options does not mean that the United States is now comfortably configured for all conceivable nuclear showdowns. On the contrary, a good case can be made that despite its salutary step in the direction of acquiring added strategic flexibility, the United States has yet to prepare itself consciously for the actual contingency of nuclear war. Were the development of a plausible war-fighting posture in fact our most abiding strategic objective, we would be providing for industrial hardening and effective civil defense, enhancing the survivability of our command and control and space-based surveillance systems, acquiring a capability for strategic force reconstitution during wartime, and so on. There is increasing evidence of such activity in current *Soviet* strategic programs, but the dominant emphasis in U.S. defense planning still seems oriented far more toward shoring up deterrence than toward hedging against the possibility of a deterrence breakdown. I am indebted to Victor Jackson for calling this important point to my attention.

### III. SOVIET PERSPECTIVES ON NUCLEAR FORCE APPLICATION AND TARGETING

In sharp contrast to current U.S. nuclear policy, known Soviet military doctrine on the use of nuclear weapons is stark in its simplicity. In the event of a deterrence failure, the prime imperative of Soviet strategic policy is to capture the initiative and carry out massive nuclear strikes against the combined U.S. military and economic-administrative target system, with a view toward "breaking up" the U.S. nuclear war effort; simultaneously moving with hard-hitting offensive operations in the forward land theater; and--through a combination of diminishing the U.S. war-waging potential and thrusting U.S. society into disorganization and chaos--ultimately achieving decisive military victory.<sup>38</sup>

There are implicit threshold distinctions in enunciated Soviet military thought (between, for example, theater and intercontinental war, and conventional and nuclear operations), and there have been public Soviet pronouncements with increasing frequency in recent years that a European conflict involving only conventional weapons need not "inevitably" escalate to the nuclear level. Soviet military doctrine also recognizes the possibility that theater *nuclear* war may be subject to mutually imposed restraints against strategic nuclear exchanges between the homelands of the two superpowers. Aside from these elementary propositions, however, Soviet military thinking gives all appearances of emanating from a conceptual universe fundamentally different from that of its U.S. counterpart. References to escalation control, crisis management, and intrawar deterrence (all of which figure prominently in current U.S. strategic planning) are conspicuously absent from Soviet military writing, as is any treatment of the idea that limitation should be a conscious *goal* of intrawar nuclear targeting (rather than merely a by-product of the adversary's unilaterally imposed self-restraint). The Soviets have not commented

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<sup>38</sup> For a detailed presentation and analysis of Soviet doctrinal materials bearing on this point, see Leon Gouré, Foy D. Kohler, and Mose L. Harvey, *The Role of Nuclear Forces in Current Soviet Strategy*, Center for Advanced International Studies, University of Miami, 1974.

publicly on the theme of selective nuclear strikes as instruments for demonstrating resolve and exerting bargaining leverage in superpower conflicts. On the contrary, Soviet military thought seems to reflect a consciously (and, from the U.S. perspective, disturbingly) straightforward approach to nuclear targeting: Once deterrence fails, nuclear weapons are to be used with whatever intensity necessary to defeat the enemy militarily.

This is not to say that Soviet military thinkers see a discontinuity between politics and war, or that they believe all objectives must be subordinated to military considerations once the threshold of armed conflict is crossed. Indeed, Soviet military writings heavily emphasize the Clausewitzian principle that war--even high-intensity thermonuclear war--is a supremely political event and must be conducted at all times with a vision toward the controlling importance of political objectives. But Soviet thinking on this score runs in a quite different direction from that of the United States. Current U.S. nuclear policy regards nuclear weapons as psychopolitical instruments aimed--through a combination of measured force application and skillful threatsmanship--at influencing the perceptions and risk-taking proclivities of the Soviet leadership and thereby attempting to shape Soviet *behavior*. Soviet military doctrine, however, seems totally uninterested in these diplomatic and manipulative functions and regards nuclear weapons instead as last-resort instruments for decisively eradicating the U.S. capability for continued fighting.

#### THE SOVIET DOCTRINAL IMAGE OF A FUTURE NUCLEAR WAR

Although the principal tenets of Soviet military doctrine have remained more or less constant since the early 1960s, perceptible shifts in some of its emphases have occurred in response to changed weapons technology, the emergence of U.S.-Soviet nuclear parity, and shifts in the threat system generated by modifications in U.S. theater-war capabilities and concepts. Throughout the Khrushchev era and during the initial years of the Brezhnev incumbency, it was characteristic of Soviet military doctrinal pronouncements to remain focused predominantly on a Soviet variant of the "modal thermonuclear-war paradigm" closely

similar to that held in the United States. Nuclear war, it was then postulated, was most likely to begin with a massive U.S. nuclear attack against the Soviet Union without significant restraints and aimed at decisive military victory. Informed by this dominant image of nuclear war initiation, Soviet doctrine proceeded to lay out several key themes and imperatives, including (a) the need to maintain strategic forces that could quickly reach a state of high combat readiness, (b) timely warning of an impending U.S. attack, (c) quick, massive strategic counterstrikes aimed at breaking up the U.S. attack, (d) simultaneous initiation of combined-arms offensive operations in the European theater, and ultimately (e) the occupation of Europe and the destruction of the United States as a militarily potent entity. This doctrinal perspective was heavily laced with implied endorsement of preemption as a standard operating premise, and occasionally included explicit assertions that the Soviet strategic bomber and missile force would be launched upon assessment of an incoming U.S. attack.<sup>39</sup>

In more recent years, Soviet doctrinal writings have come to include discussions of the character and requirements of nuclear war growing out of an escalatory process beginning with nonnuclear combat operations between NATO and Warsaw Pact forces. There are still, of course, ritual statements in the Soviet literature to the effect that strategic nuclear war would be uncompromisingly destructive and that the Soviet side would ultimately emerge "victorious." Yet both the burden of Soviet military planning and, increasingly, the tone of Soviet doctrinal commentary indicate that the Soviets, like ourselves, see a major strategic nuclear war--if it occurs at all--coming out of an expansion or eruption of theater warfare rather than with no prior political-military hostilities.

This Soviet image of nuclear war has noteworthy differences from prevailing U.S. official thinking and planning. For one thing, U.S.

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<sup>39</sup> See, for example, the following assertion that in the event of a nuclear war, the Soviet Union's missiles and bombers "would take off *even before the aggressor's first rockets, to say nothing of his bombers, reached their targets.*" I. Glagolev and V. Larionov, "Soviet Defense Might and Peaceful Coexistence," *International Affairs* (Moscow), No. 11, December 1963, p. 32 (emphasis in the original).

theater-war concepts tend to be reactive and defensive, aimed at (a) deterring a Soviet theater offensive if possible, (b) stopping it in place if it nonetheless occurs, (c) doing so with conventional weapons if possible, (d) using nuclear weapons initially only in support of conventional operations should the threshold have to be crossed, (e) studiously keeping the nuclear threshold as high as possible, and (f) endeavoring to revert the situation to something roughly like the status quo ante. Soviet thinking, while no less interested in seeking an economy of force and destruction, reflects quite different emphases and far fewer concerns. For one thing, it is explicitly offensive, aimed at changing the European status quo rather than preserving it. Should a NATO/Warsaw Pact ground campaign get under way for any reason, Soviet doctrine elevates the military defeat of the opposing side to a supreme level of importance. Restraint is regarded far more as a convenience than as an imperative. There is considerably less stress placed on the importance of keeping the nuclear threshold high and accordingly much less apparent hesitancy about using nuclear weapons. Finally, Soviet doctrine tends to regard nuclear operations not as carefully measured means of supporting the conventional campaign but as independent means of assuring the defeat of the enemy within the theater if possible and at the intercontinental-war level if necessary. Soviet military writings and statements indicate an underlying (and uniquely Soviet) concept of the escalation process that, in roughly reconstructed form, suggests the following planning logic.

#### Initiation of Theater-War Conventional Operations

Unlike American writings on strategy and crisis management, which dwell heavily on alternative ways a European theater war could be triggered, Soviet doctrinal writings are devoid of rumination over scenarios of war-initiation. Occasionally one encounters passing references to the possibility that certain international "flash points" like the Middle East can lead to direct superpower clashes.<sup>40</sup> On the

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<sup>40</sup> See Lt. General P. Zhilin's several comments to this effect in "The Military Aspects of Détente," *International Affairs* (Moscow), No. 12, December 1973, pp. 24-27.

Central European front, however, where U.S.-Soviet military planning and forces are predominantly oriented and where the greatest security interests of the two powers lie, Soviet military writings avoid discussion of the critical circumstances that could set the escalatory process in motion, merely take it as given that armed conflict has occurred, and proceed directly to consideration of the sorts of operations Soviet forces would be likely to undertake.

In general, the Soviet strategic calculus regarding the dynamics of a NATO/Warsaw Pact conflict (and the role of Soviet forces in it) seems to unfold something like this: The outbreak of war along the eastern flank of the NATO Center Region is first stipulated. (The implication is that it would stem from some provocation or ill-conceived adventurism on the part of the United States or its allies.) In such circumstances, the combined conventional land and air forces of the Warsaw Pact would (a) contain and check the NATO ground operation, and (b) immediately launch into a massive armored and mechanized infantry offensive across a broad front to roll back the NATO force, penetrate deep into NATO territory, defeat the opposing theater forces in the process, and consolidate a new status quo behind a newly established forward line of demarcation.

Soviet military thought displays full confidence that Soviet conventional forces could prevail. It also implicitly acknowledges that combat operations could cease at this threshold and become replaced by a post-engagement U.S.-NATO effort to salvage the situation as well as possible through diplomatic negotiations from a position of weakness. In this connection, Soviet military writings since the late 1960s have frequently noted the possibility that a theater war could remain confined to nonnuclear operations and have explicitly enjoined the Soviet armed forces to prepare not only for nuclear combat but also for theater offensives using only conventional weapons.<sup>41</sup> The Soviets are not sanguine about the *probability* that the war will remain conventional,

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<sup>41</sup>For a well-informed discussion of this point, see the appendix on "Soviet Military Strategy" in Trevor Cliffe, *Military Technology and European Balance*, Adelphi Paper No. 89, International Institute of Strategic Studies, London, 1972, pp. 29-35.

however, and generally seem to assume that the United States and NATO, once pushed to the limit by the Soviet land offensive, will eventually be driven to transition over to nuclear operations in an eleventh-hour effort to save the day.

#### Threshold of Theater Nuclear Operations

Soviet planners undoubtedly recognize that the United States and NATO, if faced with an imminent rout at the conventional level, would have two basic nuclear escalation alternatives to choose from: (a) a highly selective and essentially symbolic use of nuclear weapons either within the theater or against the USSR itself, aimed at demonstrating U.S. resolve and signaling the gravity with which the United States viewed the evolving situation; or (b) a more widespread use of nuclear strikes throughout the theater, aimed not only at raising the stakes of the conflict but also at actually halting the Soviet offensive, diminishing the Soviet conventional force posture, destroying the Soviet theater nuclear forces, and regaining the initiative in the theater engagement.

Which of these two U.S. nuclear use options the Soviets believe would be more likely has not been revealed, and it is probable that Soviet contingency planners are genuinely not clear on the question. Logically, one would assume that the two alternative forms of transition to nuclear use would present the Soviets with sharply divergent threat images and confront them with substantially different operational implications. Yet if such distinctions exist in the private calculations of Soviet military planners, they are not reflected in the declaratory record of Soviet military policy. Soviet military doctrine seems to suggest that *any* U.S. nuclear use, whatever its form or purpose, would relieve the Soviets of any obligation to observe restraints on the use of nuclear weapons within the theater.

Soviet military literature is quite explicit in laying out the requirements for theater-war countermeasures once the nuclear threshold is breached. Colonel A. A. Sidorenko's *The Offensive* (1970), probably the most elaborate and detailed public exposition of Soviet theater war doctrine and concepts to date, dwells heavily on theater nuclear operations and is unusually specific in explicating doctrinal views on such

matters as targeting objectives, the timing and intensity of nuclear strikes, and the relationship of nuclear operations to the larger theater war effort. Although Sidorenko does not explicitly rule out symbolic strikes of the sort that have been prominently treated in Western strategic discussions, the tenor and focus of his commentary make overwhelmingly clear his view that the function of nuclear weapons in theater warfare is supremely military. "In the case of their employment," he points out, "nuclear weapons will become the main means for destroying the enemy in battle."<sup>42</sup> Citing the observation of tsarist General Suvorov that "a forest which has not been completely cut down grows up again," Sidorenko repeatedly stresses the central importance of seizing the initiative, carrying out massive theater-wide nuclear strikes, shocking the enemy into disorganization and chaos, destroying his capacity for collective military action, and ultimately securing military victory in the shortest possible time. Strongly implied in his discussion is that anything short of maximum effort, such as isolated nuclear demonstrations and hesitant half-measures, would risk sacrificing the initiative, exposing Soviet forces to enemy nuclear operations, and possibly losing the prospect of victory altogether. In Sidorenko's words, "a delay in the destruction of the means of nuclear attack will permit the enemy to launch nuclear strikes first and may lead to heavy losses and even to the defeat of the offensive."<sup>43</sup>

On the question of preemption, Sidorenko leaves no room for ambiguity. Most Soviet writings have restricted themselves to veiled intimations that in the event of an imminent enemy nuclear initiative, Soviet forces would act promptly to "break up" the attack before it could be fully carried out. Sidorenko, however, categorically asserts that "preemption in launching a nuclear strike is the decisive condition for the attainment of superiority over [the enemy] and the seizure and retention of the initiative."<sup>44</sup> Similar stress is placed on the preeminence of the counterforce mission. Noting the presence of a

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<sup>42</sup>Colonel A. A. Sidorenko, *The Offensive*, translated by the U.S. Air Force, Washington, D.C., 1970, p. 109.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 115.



large U.S. inventory of theater nuclear forces in Europe, Sidorenko observes that "the successful conduct of the offensive is unthinkable without the timely and dependable neutralization and destruction of these means," and that "all tactical means of nuclear attack are area targets suitable for the launching of nuclear strikes of corresponding yield."<sup>45</sup> Such nuclear strikes, moreover, are not envisioned as a single-salvo operation followed by a pause to let the dust settle and allow an assessment of the results but as a sustained effort waged day and night until all remaining, targetable objectives are destroyed. Soviet theater targeting doctrine also stipulates the importance of distinguishing launch-ready nuclear forces from those delivery systems not mated with nuclear warheads and stresses the necessity of striking the former on a time-urgent basis as the priority task of nuclear combat operations. In Sidorenko's formulation:

It is known . . . that U.S. ground forces have a large number of means of nuclear attack. However, this does not mean that each launcher or gun can have and employ a nuclear weapon at each given moment. The enemy may have considerably fewer such weapons than guns or launchers capable of delivering these weapons to target. Therefore, it is very important to receive reliable data in good time not only about the location of the means of nuclear attack but also of the presence of nuclear ammunition with them.<sup>46</sup>

Obviously this objective places a high premium on reliable tactical intelligence regarding the disposition of NATO's nuclear forces. Although he concedes that timely acquisition and processing of such intelligence is a "difficult task," Sidorenko nonetheless asserts that it is possible.

#### Threshold of Intercontinental Nuclear Operations

As in the case of theater nuclear war, Soviet doctrinal writings leave us with little understanding of how Soviet planners visualize the likely initiation of a central exchange between the superpowers' homelands. The impression one gathers is that the Soviets see the problem

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 132-133.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

of intercontinental nuclear war as a variant of their theater-war model writ large, featuring the same emphasis on the familiar themes of preemption, initiative, continuity of the offensive, and massive force-application for wearing down the enemy's war-waging abilities. One notable difference is that although they continue to stress large-scale countermilitary operations, they also assign an important role to countereconomic and counteradministrative targeting, with a view toward destroying U.S. nonmilitary power resources, disrupting the functioning of U.S. society, and eradicating the national leadership and political-military command infrastructure that would be required for the United States to pursue a coherent wartime strategy.

There is nothing in Soviet military doctrine that approximates the U.S. assured retaliation concept, and Soviet writings do not insist that a central function of nuclear operations is the decimation of the U.S. population for its own sake. Yet the targeting criteria those writings *do* specify leave no doubt that declared Soviet nuclear strategy would feature high civilian fatalities as an inevitable by-product. Moreover, at this level of violence, Soviet doctrine shows no interest in any notion of limitation. Unlike U.S. pronouncements, Soviet commentary on intercontinental nuclear war reveals no concern for minimizing collateral damage to value resources, either as a gesture of restraint or as a moral end in itself. Also, in contrast to the current U.S. preoccupation with developing controlled targeting options for use as instruments of escalation control and intrawar bargaining, the Soviet Union continues to reject such ideas as being both impractical in principle and unattuned to the realities of modern war. Both the logic of Soviet military doctrine and the record of Soviet behavior in past crises suggest that Moscow's attitude is akin to the axiom that one does not hit a king unless one is determined to kill him. This implies that in any direct U.S.-Soviet confrontation, the Soviets would tend initially to follow a policy of conservatism, studiously avoiding nuclear demonstration attacks against CONUS and other resolve-testing ploys designed to intimidate the United States into diplomatic accommodation, and hoping that stern verbal warnings backed up by visible Soviet strategic power would move the crisis off the rails of escalation in a way congenial to Soviet

political interests. It also implies, however, that once they became convinced a major strategic war was unavoidable, they would want to move promptly to large-scale countermilitary strikes against the United States, with no intervening half-measures against selected subsets of the American target array.<sup>47</sup> Were the Soviets to follow the edicts of their military doctrine to the letter, such an operation would presumably feature at the outset a massed and coordinated ICBM attack against U.S. missile sites, alert bomber bases, and early warning facilities, followed closely by additional strikes against the U.S. political-military command network and other war-supporting capabilities such as SLBM ports, troop marshalling areas, airlift departure points, and possibly satellite surveillance systems.

#### Termination and Aftermath

On the important question of how a nuclear war would ultimately be settled, Soviet military writings and statements have had little to say. About the closest they have come to elaborating any specific image of what winning would involve has been to imply occasionally that the dislocations levied by a massive preemptive nuclear attack would so thoroughly destroy the U.S. capacity for organized strategic action that the war could be settled on terms favorable to the Soviet

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<sup>47</sup> Even if the Soviets were to fall short of a "large-scale" attack and could content themselves with more measured strikes while holding in reserve a larger force for deterring further U.S. escalation, the Soviet General Staff would still probably be more inclined to counsel militarily purposeful operations than the clever targeting of bizarre aim points (such as U.S. oil refineries or electric power generating plants) simply because they happened to aggregate in a superficially neat "LNO target set." Albert Wohlstetter has observed in this connection that many of "the scenarios fantasized in discussing limited nuclear confrontation are totally devoid of political context. They ignore the fact that in the real world it is likely that each side would have powerful incentives to select targets for their military significance in relation to an ongoing conventional war. These targets would not be abstract counters to be exchanged in a game of nuclear checkers where each player demonstrates his 'resolve'." "Threats and Promises of Peace," *Orbis*, Vol. XVIII, No. 4, Winter 1974, p. 1136. His point was intended to be instructive in the U.S. LNO planning context, but it also happens to be a very concise statement of probable Soviet limited nuclear targeting premises.

Union forthwith. In this regard, Colonel General N. Lomov suggested some years ago that massive nuclear-missile strikes can "at once, from the very beginning of the war, achieve results of great significance, . . . by-passing the methodical, step-by-step development of tactical successes into operational, then strategic, and finally political results."<sup>48</sup> Another Soviet military spokesman writing in this same vein observed that a successful preemptive nuclear strike can "in almost an instant disorganize and demoralize the enemy's forces, obliging them to operate in uncoordinated and chaotic fashion, and even to cease resistance."<sup>49</sup> These intimations of an underlying Soviet "theory" of victory doubtless reflect considerable whistling in the dark and certainly should not be read as expressions of Soviet confidence that things would actually work out so swimmingly. Nonetheless, they may indicate a guarded belief that if a Soviet preemptive attack succeeded in leaving the U.S. prostrate and the Soviet Union not only largely undamaged but in possession of a large residual force, the United States might opt for a diplomatic settlement rather than launch a punitive response with its surviving retaliatory forces, which would only assure even greater U.S. urban-industrial losses in reprisal.

#### POSSIBLE PRIVATE SOVIET THINKING AND PLANNING

Soviet doctrine serves many functions besides prescribing operational strategies for the Soviet armed forces. It has an important role in enhancing Soviet military morale and in imparting a sense of continued purpose to Soviet troops in an era in which the prime objective of strategic power is to deter wars rather than wage them. The confident Soviet military assertions regarding the "winnability" of nuclear war and the probability of Soviet victory may reflect far more an effort to instill a spirit of confidence and optimism in the Soviet armed forces than any expectation or belief on the part of the Soviet

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<sup>48</sup>"The Influence of Soviet Military Doctrine on the Development of Military Art," *Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil*, No. 21, November 1965, p. 21.

<sup>49</sup>Colonel S. Tiushkevich, "Necessity and Chance in Modern Warfare," *Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil*, No. 10, May 1964, p. 40.

military leadership.<sup>50</sup> Soviet doctrinal themes also provide ready bureaucratic rationales for the various armed services to invoke in justifying their requests for new weaponry in the competitive arena of Soviet resource allocation politics. In particular, the stress on the importance of combined-arms operations for securing victory in war not only is a straightforward statement of strategic principle (which the Soviet NCA may or may not entirely accept in practice) but also helps to assure that all branches of the Soviet military get a respectable piece of the action in the allocation of strategic roles and missions. Finally, Soviet doctrinal pronouncements have a vital propaganda role in manipulating the perceptions of external adversaries, which manifests itself (among other ways) in declaratory efforts to undermine preferred U.S. strategic options, such as city-avoidance targeting, by placing the United States on notice in advance that it cannot count on Soviet reciprocation. Accordingly, however useful they may be in exploiting U.S. uncertainties, they may not faithfully reflect real Soviet contingency planning nor indicate how the Soviet leadership would actually behave in an escalating nuclear crisis.<sup>51</sup>

Soviet military doctrine is almost certainly an incomplete representation of actual Soviet strategic thinking and planning. States do

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<sup>50</sup> See, for example, the late Soviet Defense Minister Grechko's assertion that in the event of a world war, "we are firmly convinced that victory in this war would go to us." Report at the Fifth All-Army Conference of Party Organization Secretaries, *Krasnaia zvezda*, March 28, 1973. See also the earlier proclamation by Lt. Colonel Ye. Rybkin that "any *a priori* rejection of the possibility of victory is harmful because it leads to moral disarmament, to a disbelief in victory, and to fatalism and passivity." "On the Essence of a World Nuclear-Missile War," *Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil*, No. 17, September 1965, cited in Roman Kolkowicz, *The Red "Hawks" on the Rationality of Nuclear War*, The Rand Corporation, RM-4899-PR, March 1966, p. 15. Such pronouncements seem far more suggestive of exhortations and exercises in wish-fulfillment than statements of actual Soviet military expectations.

<sup>51</sup> For further discussion of these diverse nonmilitary roles played by Soviet military doctrinal statements and writings, see Benjamin S. Lambeth, "The Sources of Soviet Military Doctrine," in F. B. Horton, III, A. C. Rogerson, and E. L. Warner, III (eds.), *Comparative Defense Policy*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1974, pp. 200-216.

not always say what they mean, mean what they say, or reveal all of their operational concepts and contingency plans. This is particularly true in the case of the Soviet Union, whose natural penchant for secrecy makes its spokesmen almost constitutionally incapable of publicly discussing even elementary details of their national security policies. If it is a valid hypothesis that the constraints of Soviet secrecy inhibit Soviet military commentators from presenting the finer points of their strategic thinking with the volubility and candor that one typically finds in U.S. Defense Department posture statements, then there is every reason to believe that the overt record of Soviet military doctrine represents the tip of a very large iceberg, which we should accept only as a partial reflection of the overall Soviet image of nuclear war.

Finally, Soviet military doctrine is very much a creation of professional Soviet military men and largely reflects idiosyncratic Soviet military perspectives on the problems of survival and victory in the nuclear age. Although it obviously bears the formal imprimatur of the Communist Party, it no more necessarily represents the underlying strategic perceptions and expectations of Soviet civilian leaders than formal U.S. military contingency plans indicate the way the U.S. NCA would actually cope with a deep nuclear crisis. Both logic and the history of Soviet circumspection in past crises give reason to believe that in any actual showdown between the superpowers, considerations of self-interest and respect for the awesome consequences of unrestrained nuclear war might lead the Soviet political leadership toward behavior considerably more measured, at least in the initial phases of fighting, than that formally prescribed. It has not been uncommon in past crises for the Soviets to abandon their rigid precrisis threats in favor of day-to-day improvisation. It is reasonable to speculate, therefore, that in a gradually intensifying European confrontation that spilled over into limited strategic exchanges between the superpowers, the Soviets might give second thoughts to the advisability of their more extreme strategic preconceptions.

This is not, of course, to suggest that Soviet doctrinal statements bear no connection to actual Soviet planning or to imply that in

such a crisis the Soviet Union would behave according to the norms of U.S. strategy. But the mere fact that Soviet doctrine prescribes certain textbook-like rules of engagement (such as massively preempting upon categorical warning of an imminent enemy attack) in no way guarantees that those rules would be automatically followed. Soviet strategy may reflect a legitimate body of last-resort operating principles, but it is in no way universally binding on the Soviet NCA.<sup>52</sup> Neither the hard-target capabilities of the Soviet ICBM force nor emphasis on the importance of war-waging options oblige the Soviet leaders to seek opportunities to put those capabilities and options to test. There is a vast difference between prudent investment against the possibility that deterrence might fail and the notion that large-scale nuclear war is a workable policy alternative. And on the latter score, there is an abundance of historical evidence to indicate that the Soviet political leaders are under no delusions that general war is anything but a grim specter to be avoided at every reasonable cost.

Even in the published Soviet doctrinal literature, there are indications that the Soviet military may not be as firmly wedded to SIOP-scale nuclear operations as a superficial reading might lead one to believe. One such indication resides in the important *omissions* one sees in the public Soviet doctrinal line. In their prolific treatment of the massive-exchange variant of intercontinental nuclear war, recent Soviet military writings have not explicitly ruled out all other variants but have merely slighted them (or appeared to slight them) through selective inattention. Published Soviet criticisms of current U.S. strategy have uniformly emanated from civilian commentators, not professional military officers, and have appeared in media that have substantial propaganda functions. They have typically resorted to the language and logic used by U.S. critics of the strategy and, as one hypothesis, may perhaps be explained as an exercise in ventriloquy more than as a reflection of authoritative Soviet thinking. Moreover,

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<sup>52</sup>To the extent that Soviet doctrine energizes and informs actual Soviet nuclear contingency plans and training activities, however, it may have a *constraining* effect on the Soviet political leadership much as the SIOP of the past decade had on the U.S. NCA.

they have focused exclusively on *American* strategic policy and have remained conspicuously mute regarding the possible existence of an evolving *Soviet* policy on the question of selective targeting.<sup>53</sup> Soviet military writings have followed a parallel track with similar effect: They have not addressed current U.S. nuclear policy and have maintained silence on the theme of limited nuclear options generally. All of this may be perfectly straightforward and innocuous, but it may reflect a conscious decision to hold the line on public discussion of the limited-options issue while Soviet leaders privately try to figure out the new U.S. strategy and what it implies for Soviet strategic planning. It may also represent a deceptive surface calm beneath which Soviet military leaders and planners are giving careful consideration to the feasibility of less than insensate nuclear attack options. As a Rand colleague has suggested,

It is perhaps just because the Soviets are so interested in the distinction between deterrence and warfighting that they have kept so silent about it. The war not yet being on, this is the hour of deterrence only: by the forecast of preemption, of massive strikes right at the start, of the all-or-nothing character of nuclear war. Once the war is on, the Politburo may be ordering that "controlled" conduct about which the West (in a possible Soviet estimate) is now so prematurely chattering.<sup>54</sup>

Current Soviet military statements also suggest that if push came to shove, the Soviet NCA would be more disposed toward strategic adaptability than the public Soviet treatment of nuclear war appears to allow. Soviet General Staff Chief Kulikov not long ago lent his authority to the proposition that successful leadership and control in modern warfare call not only for "confidence and persistence, but also the clear substantiation of decisions and frequently boldness in making the

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<sup>53</sup>For discussion of Soviet public commentary on the new targeting policy to date, see Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Selective Nuclear Operations and Soviet Strategy*, The Rand Corporation, P-5506, September 1975, pp. 12-14; and Thomas W. Wolfe, *The SALT Experience: Its Impact on U.S. and Soviet Strategic Policy and Decisionmaking*, The Rand Corporation, R-1686-PR, September 1975, pp. 149-159.

<sup>54</sup>Nathan Leites, "Pretense, Wisdom, and Folly in Current Soviet Words on Nuclear War," unpublished manuscript, May 1975, p. 22.



necessary amendments in a rapidly changing situation."<sup>55</sup> The late Soviet Defense Minister Grechko added his own support to this notion when he observed, during a tutorial on the contemporary relevance of Soviet experiences in World War II, that the supremacy of Soviet military art was "displayed by the fact that during the war the Soviet Command implemented its plans increasingly flexibly and efficiently, and was more far-sighted in its plans and more facile and resolute in the means of implementing them." He went on to note that "the active, creative style of Soviet military thought was shown by innovation and the quest for forms and methods of conducting military operations according most fully with the conditions of the war."<sup>56</sup> Such pronouncements may tell us little about how the Soviet forces would translate these ideals of flexibility and innovation into action, but they at least convey the impression that in the Soviet High Command's view, Soviet military doctrine is anything but doctrinaire.

Finally, there is the hard evidence of the Soviet arsenal of MIRVed ICBMs, whose surfeit of potential RV strength and prospective accuracy and targeting flexibility promise to permit strategic operations far more sophisticated than anything currently discussed in Soviet doctrinal writings. To note the most obvious of these potential options, the Soviets are moving toward the point where they may be able to carry out a high-confidence attack against the U.S. MINUTEMAN force solely with about 300 MIRVed SS-18s, leaving a residual force of 1000 SS-17s and SS-19s (along with a fully alerted and undepleted SLBM fleet) for carrying out selective strikes against other targets or for providing a credible intrawar deterrent against the U.S. countervalue retaliation with its surviving elements of the Triad.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, it is in large measure a concern with this specter of an *initiator* Soviet selective

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<sup>55</sup> General V. Kulikov, "High Combat Readiness--The Most Important Condition for the Reliable Defense of the Motherland," *Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil*, No. 6, March 1973, p. 20.

<sup>56</sup> Marshal A. A. Grechko, "The Science and Art of Victory," *Pravda*, February 19, 1975.

<sup>57</sup> For elaboration, see Benjamin S. Lambeth, "The Evolving Soviet Strategic Threat," *Current History*, October 1975, pp. 121-125, 152-153.

attack that has sparked doubts about the appropriateness of the U.S. SIOP in such a situation and driven the U.S. defense community to develop an additional set of more purposeful response options. Although there is no evidence that the Soviet military is actively planning for such a contingency, the idea of withholding certain forces for intrawar coercion has been tantalizingly suggested in an observation by the Soviet naval commander-in-chief, Admiral Gorshkov, that "missile-carrying submarines, owing to their great survivability in comparison to land-based launch installations, are an even more effective means of deterrence" than ICBMs.<sup>58</sup> There is also the fact, noted by former Secretary Schlesinger in Congressional testimony, that "in their exercises the Soviets have indicated far greater interest in the notions of controlled nuclear war and nonnuclear war than has ever before been reflected in Soviet doctrine."<sup>59</sup> To mention only two more possibilities, the Soviets currently have the ability to wage high-intensity theater nuclear war against NATO while retaining their central forces for deterring U.S. escalation to the intercontinental-war threshold, and they are within reaching distance of acquiring (with their prospective ocean-surveillance satellite system, SS-NX-13 SLBM, and BACKFIRE bomber) a weapons package capable of attacking U.S. carrier task forces and other naval units at sea while withholding attacks against land-based military targets in CONUS and NATO.

PROSPECTS FOR AN EVENTUAL SOVIET STRATEGY OF  
CONTROLLED NUCLEAR TARGETING

It would be premature to conclude that the Soviet leaders have fully adopted a strategy of flexible response analogous to that of the

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<sup>58</sup> Quoted in E. T. Wooldridge, Jr., "The Gorshkov Papers: Soviet Naval Doctrine for the Nuclear Age," *Orbis*, Vol. XVIII, No. 4, Winter 1975, p. 1167. As a cautionary note against running too far with this inference, an alternative possibility is that Gorshkov's comment may have been motivated simply by a bureaucratic desire on his part to justify a larger place for the SLBM force in the allocation of Soviet military missions and budgets.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in S. T. Cohen and W. C. Lyons, "A Comparison of U.S.-Allied and Soviet Tactical Nuclear Force Capabilities and Policies," *Orbis*, Vol. XIX, No. 1, Spring 1975, p. 91.

United States and assimilated it into their contingency planning and weapons acquisition criteria.<sup>60</sup> There are simply too many persistent stylistic differences between Soviet and American strategic philosophies to permit such a sweeping generalization. There is no evidence whatever, for example, to indicate that the Soviets have any sympathy for such U.S. concepts as "threats that leave something to chance" and the symbolic use of nuclear weapons as demonstrations of resolve and means of exerting psychopolitical leverage. For them, the idea of nuclear demonstration is most likely regarded as the height of strategic foolishness, since it implies a grave escalation in the *means* of inflicting violence without producing any tangible military gain, and further risks giving the other side every incentive to respond massively while he still has the strategic resources to do so. Moreover, they appear to regard nuclear crises as things to be avoided unless one seriously means business and has the most vital interests at stake, in which case they become not events to be played at with various sorts of nuclear "experimentation" but critical challenges to be decisively met by the most direct and forceful measures available.

At the same time, it is probably fair to presume simply on grounds of logic that Soviet strategic thought and contingency planning are currently in a state of profound ferment and transition, even though visible signs may be few and far between. The Soviet Union is currently in the process of acquiring the most substantial and diversified strategic posture in its history as a nuclear power, and its leaders are certainly mindful of its rich potential for carrying out a wide variety of military operations. The following remark made by a senior Soviet military theoretician, while studiously ambiguous, may be instructive:

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<sup>60</sup>For an argument that, despite its studied cautiousness, comes close to representing this view, see C. G. Jacobsen, "The Emergence of a Soviet Doctrine of Flexible Response?" *Atlantic Community Quarterly*, Vol. XII, No. 2, Summer 1974, pp. 233-238. A rather more conservative approach to the subject that provides an excellent treatment of evolving Soviet strategic developments and options yet reserves judgment on the question of where they may be pointing may be found in William R. Van Cleave, "Soviet Doctrine and Strategy: A Developing American View" (working paper prepared for a conference at the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Ebenhausen, West Germany, 1975).

Military matters have marched sharply forward under the scientific and technical revolution, and the foreign policy functions of our armed forces have changed. All this has required, and continues to require, the introduction of the appropriate changes to the content of military doctrine and to the system of views on questions of war.<sup>61</sup>

Whatever these changes may be, the United States would probably be best advised to regard them not as emulative reactions to the U.S. targeting policy or as mirror-images of contemporary American strategic concepts but rather as responses to the changing potential of Soviet strategic power, conceived in a highly idiosyncratic frame of reference and infused throughout with uniquely Soviet strategic perceptions and priorities. It is a time-worn axiom of military practice that one plays the game of war on one's own terms rather than on those of the adversary, however intellectually attractive they may appear, and that one tailors one's strategies and contingency plans in accordance with one's own strengths and interests rather than in conformity with some "objective" set of preferred military standards. Evolving Soviet strategic concepts are unlikely to bear any immediate resemblance to those that currently inform U.S. nuclear planning. The emerging Soviet image of a "limited nuclear operation," if it exists, may very well envision a massive and rapidly executed preemptive theater nuclear blitz against NATO, coupled with a simultaneous countermilitary attack against CONUS while holding U.S. cities hostage with a large residual nuclear force to deter the United States from retaliating against the Soviet ZI. This is plainly a far cry from the selectivity of current U.S. flexible options planning, but it is also a far cry from Soviet military doctrine as we know it and constitutes a potential threat that is well worth worrying about.

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<sup>61</sup> Lt. General I. Zavialov, "The Creative Nature of Soviet Military Doctrine," *Krasnaia zvezda*, April 19, 1973.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY

The foregoing discussion has explored the evolving U.S. targeting policy and examined Soviet doctrinal premises and possible private attitudes toward nuclear targeting selectivity. Even at this level of analysis, it is obvious that the two superpowers hold divergent views on the probable character of a future nuclear war, the role of strategic forces in it, the possibility and desirability of carefully orchestrated limitation, and the kind of objectives to be sought. Both countries emphasize the overriding importance of deterrence and the imperative of avoiding such a war with every possible effort. Once deterrence fails, however, the two powers seem to follow fundamentally dissimilar forms of planning logic. Perhaps oversimplified, the essence of this U.S.-Soviet doctrinal divergence is as follows:

1. The U.S. leadership regards the opening phase of a nuclear conflict far more as an extreme variant of crisis than as an apocalyptic cataclysm from which no extrication is possible. Although it is hardly sanguine about the *probability* that such a dire situation can be easily prevented from exploding, it nonetheless believes that the chances of an eleventh-hour Soviet decision to try a policy of moderation are sufficiently plausible to justify the development of initial nuclear response options sufficiently limited to give the Soviets every incentive to emulate such a policy. Accordingly, it regards SIOP-level threats--although indispensable as intrawar deterrents and last-resort options--as inadequate for facilitating lower-level nuclear crisis diplomacy aimed at preserving core U.S. values and simultaneously giving the Soviets reasonable cause to cooperate in terminating the conflict short of total nuclear commitment by both sides.

2. Soviet military leaders also seem to believe that a nuclear war would most likely begin at a low level of intensity. Unlike current U.S. policy, however, Soviet military doctrine posits that the period immediately before nuclear operations is laden with both great risk and great opportunity and thus calls for prompt Soviet seizure and maintenance of the initiative before the enemy can disrupt the Soviet

capability for effective offensive operations. For the Soviet military, an ongoing (or imminent) nuclear war does not warrant experimentation with bizarre targeting options concocted during the heat of battle but should be fought and won in the shortest time with all the military resources available--within the local theater of operations if possible and at the intercontinental level if the enemy appears inclined toward such escalation.

This fundamental asymmetry in manifest U.S. and Soviet strategic doctrines clearly exists, the Soviets seem to be telling us it will continue to exist, and no amount of clever reading between the lines of Soviet military writing will make it go away.

The question is: Does it mean anything in operational terms? There are logical reasons why the Soviets may have (or may be acquiring) a more sophisticated strategic concept than is evident from their publicly enunciated doctrinal tenets. There is also evidence from the Soviet force posture and Soviet strategic exercises indicating that they possess a range of targeting options far beyond anything covered by their declared military philosophy. Yet the fact that their emerging force structure confers on them a range of force-application alternatives in many ways as rich as that available to the United States does not mean that U.S. and Soviet strategies are converging. It is more plausible that Soviet strategic thinking is developing along a parallel but wholly independent path, in which the Soviets are asking themselves the same sorts of vexing questions currently being addressed by the U.S. nuclear planning community--and grappling with the same sorts of uncertainties and imponderables in the process--yet in a way consonant with traditional Soviet military principles rather than with those of the United States.

Those uniquely "Soviet" military principles (go first, go massive, aim for decisive victory) may set the drumbeat for current Soviet contingency planning and may heavily influence whatever "selective" strike options the Soviets ultimately develop, but they certainly do not rigidly oblige the Soviet leaders to follow preplanned courses of action or constrain them from improvising novel options in a potential nuclear crisis. It does not follow, however, that the Soviets have the latitude

to behave as thoroughly detached "rational strategic men," or that they would be able--even if they tried--to beat the United States at its own strategic game. Other constraints might act to **box** the Soviet leaders in despite their best efforts to pursue a free-form military strategy. Soviet doctrine aside, certain features of the Soviet military posture--such as less than fully developed capabilities for rapid force generation, reprogramming, attack assessment, and battle management--may force the Soviets to stick more closely to prearranged contingency plans than they might prefer. Also, Soviet leaders, no less than political elites anywhere else, are to a considerable degree prisoners of their own peculiar experiences and styles and may find themselves driven toward characteristic modes of action that have nothing to do with the declared precepts of Soviet military doctrine.

The United States should not hope (and certainly should not expend great efforts to raise the possibility) that the Soviets will eventually come to accept whatever wisdom there may be in contemporary U.S. strategic planning. We have had past experiences in attempting to "educate" the Soviets to cooperate with the norms of American strategic thinking, and for the most part they have ended up as failures. Indeed, we should probably ask ourselves searchingly whether we even *want* the Soviets to develop a strategy of selective and controlled targeting analogous to our own. The principal reason behind current U.S. development of targeting flexibility is precisely to *disincline* the Soviets from doing the same and to *deter* them from carrying out whatever limited options they might nonetheless develop. Given the formidable capabilities implied by the emerging Soviet nuclear force structure, we would scarcely be doing ourselves a service by encouraging them to develop credible and rational strategies for those capabilities.

We should not worry excessively about staking the success or failure of current U.S. strategic planning on the course and outcome of future developments in Soviet nuclear planning. Flexibility is a valuable asset to have *whatever* the other side does. It should be regarded more as a low-cost investment against a remote possibility than as something doomed to failure if the Soviets march to a different

drummer. As Secretary Schlesinger put it in his FY 1976 Defense Department posture statement, "even if there is only a small probability that limited response options would deter an attack or bring a nuclear war to a rapid conclusion without large-scale damage to cities, it is a probability which, for the sake of our citizens, we should not foreclose."<sup>62</sup>

What we *are* obliged to do is to keep a close watch on evolving Soviet strategic capabilities, with a view toward better understanding the options they may eventually confer on the Soviet NCA. Whatever track contemporary Soviet military thinking may be running on, there is no question that the Soviet Union is acquiring the strategic nuclear wherewithal to do--or threaten to do--things far beyond anything currently addressed in the Soviet military literature. As a consequence, the evolving Soviet military scene warrants the most careful and reflective scrutiny by U.S. strategic analysts in the years ahead, with particular attention to the diverse opportunities afforded by Soviet strategic power, the sorts of situations that might provide a context for those opportunities to be tested, the conceptual and technical constraints that might inhibit Soviet flexibility, and, perhaps most of all, the continued Soviet vulnerabilities that might usefully be exploited by countervailing U.S. and NATO capabilities and strategies.

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<sup>62</sup>Annual Defense Department Report, FY 1976, p. II-7.